

The Impact of Paid Parental Leave on Gender Equity in New Zealand: Case Studies

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Master of Arts in Political Science**

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Abstract

There are significant gendered patterns in New Zealand's labour market. For example, there is a persistent gender pay gap, and New Zealand mothers participate less in the formal labour market than women without children (NACEW, 2015). Advocates of paid parental leave argue that adequate paid leave can help to redress this imbalance, by protecting parents' jobs while they care for infants. However, critics of New Zealand's paid parental leave scheme note its status as one of the most limited schemes in the OECD (OECD Family Database, 2015), largely due to a political background that frames the issue of parental leave narrowly in terms of child welfare and the interests of business, which may limit its potential impact on wider issues of gender equity in the workplace. This thesis examines this criticism of New Zealand's parental leave scheme through the experiences of seven women, who were interviewed about how they and their families used paid parental leave, and the subsequent impact they feel it has had on their lives and careers. The participants were drawn from the human resources and insurance industries, and occupied a range of different roles.

While this case study can only offer insight into a small group of professional women, it suggests that current New Zealand parental leave legislation is important, but not sufficient, in addressing gender equity issues in the labour market. While the current paid parental leave scheme did help the families interviewed, participants often still faced significant challenges in balancing paid work with family. Notably, the women interviewed reported that they still assumed the bulk of unpaid caregiving as a result of gendered social expectations surrounding parenting – a reality that incremental increases to parental leave may struggle to impact. They also considered other factors, such as a supportive and flexible workplace, to be as important to them when it came to successfully balancing career and family over time. Future reforms to paid parental leave would need to consider how best to address equity-related issues such as the lack of fathers taking parental leave, the inequities faced by women in low income and precarious work, and persistent gender-based expectations about parenting roles.

Chapter One: Introduction – why is paid parental leave important for gender equity?

If women are to achieve real equality in the workplace and society, then universal access to paid maternity leave that provides for income replacement and security of employment is essential. Without this, there is no way of adequately integrating and addressing women's dual roles as producers and reproducers. (Baird, 2004, p. 270)

1.1 The nature of paid parental leave

Balancing the competing demands of caring for young children and participating in paid employment is a significant challenge, not just for parents but for employers and governments. There is significant evidence that full-time parental care for the first months of a child's life has a strongly positive effect on its health: infant mortality is decreased and breastfeeding can become better established (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, pp. 30-31). Additionally, many mothers as well as fathers want to have this important time to bond with their children (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 28). However, socio-economic reality and cultural norms in many societies means that the primary responsibility for caring for young infants typically falls on the mother, even if she has a partner (Aulette et al., 2009). Once this pattern of responsibilities is established it may continue for many years to come, having a profound limiting impact on mothers' participation in paid work and careers (Briar, 1992, pp. 54-55).

It is particularly clear that being a primary caregiver for young children can have a significant negative impact on gender equity in the labour market: for example, women with children tend to earn less than those without (Blau, 1998, p. 159). In New Zealand, women with dependent children are also less likely to have a university qualification, to work in a professional industry, to be a permanent employee (as opposed to a casual or temporary employee), or to

work full time (Flynn & Harris, 2015). Women's unpaid breaks for childbearing and rearing are also identified as a key contributing factor to a persistent gender pay gap in New Zealand (NACEW, 2015): New Zealand men's median hourly earnings were 11.8% higher than women's in 2015 (New Zealand Ministry for Women, 2016). Additionally, women are also overrepresented in non-permanent, or 'precarious', employment (Curtin & Devere, 2006, p. 197): for example, a 2012 survey found that 7 out of 10 New Zealand employees in fixed-term jobs were women, as were 6 out of 10 employees in casual jobs (Ongley et al., 2013, p. 7). While the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) notes that New Zealand has one of the lowest gender pay gaps in the OECD (OECD, 2013), this figure is based on the wages of full time employees, and as such, it fails to capture the overrepresentation of New Zealand women in part-time, seasonal and casual work (New Zealand Ministry for Women, 2016). Waldfogel (1998a) offers three explanations for this continuing discrepancy, which she terms the 'family gap'. Firstly, women with children might bring 'less effort' to the paid labour market, prioritising their family over the demands of paid employment. Alternatively, they might be discriminated against in the labour market by employers; or they may face structural barriers to participation in the paid labour market, such as a lack of parental leave, flexible working or affordable childcare (Waldfogel, 1998a, p. 507).

Whether, and how, a government ought to intervene in order to resolve these gender inequities in the labour market is a complex question. However, one of the most commonly used policy instruments are parental leave schemes. The basic premise of such policies is that the breaks in paid employment that childbearing and childcare often require can result in unequal long and short-term career outcomes for men and women in the labour market, and therefore some intervention is required to ensure that women are not unfairly disadvantaged in this regard (Baird, 2004, p. 270; Wilson, 1998, p. 225). Consequently, all parental leave schemes offer women a period of leave from their jobs without penalty after childbirth. Most schemes also offer financial benefits for this period, to mitigate the loss of income from not working (Addati et al., 2014, p. x; Baird, 2004, p. 261; OECD Family Database, 2015, p. 1). The observed impact of parental leave (as opposed to having no parental leave at all)

is that women are more likely to return to the same job they had previously after giving birth, which enhances their experience and connection to the labour force, and consequently increases their lifetime wages (Waldfoegel, 1998b, p. 154).

New Zealand has had parental leave legislation since 1980. However, New Zealand's parental leave scheme has lagged behind most other OECD countries with respect to the period of leave allowed and the amount of payments, or lack thereof (Callister, 2002, p. 280). The scheme has developed incrementally over the last three decades, to reach the current position of 18 weeks of paid leave and additional unpaid leave of up to a year. In contrast to other nations, the period of payments and their amounts are both still lower than most countries in the OECD (OECD Family Database, 2015, p. 4), and while leave can be transferred to partners, there is no paid leave specifically for partners.

There have been frequent calls for extensions to New Zealand's parental leave scheme from a variety of actors, both within and outside Parliament. Demands include a longer period of pay, a higher level of pay, and an extension of paid leave to partners as well as mothers (NACEW, 2008, p. 5; New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 72; Vance, 2015). The key question addressed in this thesis is, given these limitations, how effective is New Zealand's current paid parental leave scheme when it comes to redressing the gender inequity between men and women in the labour market? If it is not effective, what policy changes might make more of a difference?

1.2 Terminology – what is the difference between gender equity and gender equality?

In this thesis I distinguish between the terms 'gender equality' and 'gender equity'. By '*gender equality*' I am referring to formal equality, whereby women and men are treated equally before the law: the 'Human Rights Act' 1993, which outlawed discriminatory treatment on the basis of gender, and the 'Equal Pay Act' 1972, which required that men and women be paid equally for performing

the same job, are examples of legislation that ensure formal equality (Wilson, 1998, p. 224). By “*gender equity*” I am referring to explicit recognition of the differences between men and women that would result in a systemic disadvantage if a gender-blind approach were followed; therefore, differential treatment is required to achieve true equality (Wilson, 1998, p. 225). This concept is closely linked to the concept of ‘gender mainstreaming’ and associated public policy tools, whereby the differing socio-economic responsibilities and needs of both men and women are considered when making any public policy decisions, in order to achieve substantive equality between men and women (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, 1997). The ‘Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act’ 1980 was an example of equitable legislation, as it recognised the unique needs of women to take time off paid work for childbirth and to care for young infants. Therefore, any reference to ‘gender equity in the workplace’ in this thesis is referring to efforts to ensure the equitable participation of men and women in the paid workforce.

There is a variety of terminology used to describe the leave taken by parents to care for children. In this thesis, the following terms have been used:

“*Parental leave*” is used in this thesis to mean a form of leave from paid employment for the express purpose of caring for an infant. It may be paid or unpaid.

“*Paid parental leave*” is used to mean a form of leave for the purpose of caring for an infant that is recompensed to some degree, either by the individual’s employer or by government.

“*Maternity leave*” is leave expressly provided for the mother of an infant. It may be paid or unpaid.

“*Paternity leave*” is leave expressly provided for the father of an infant, or the partner of the mother. It may be paid or unpaid.

1.3 Understanding 'gender equity' through opportunities and outcomes in the workplace

The preceding discussion has focused on gender equity in the workplace in terms of pay equity and women's participation in the labour market. While these issues are of immediate concern in New Zealand, it is important to note at the outset that gender equity goes beyond concepts of formal or procedural equality, such as equal pay and the right to freedom from discrimination. Gender equity in the workplace encapsulates equality of both opportunity and outcomes. For example, Marion Baird defines gender equity from the perspective of social feminism, which recognises:

"...the need for equity, justice, independence and economic equality and explicitly recognises women's status as mothers, workers and citizens, as well as the potentially conflicting nature of these roles at a particular stage of a woman's life and career. In order to achieve a balance of these roles without disadvantaging women for child-bearing, some compensation is needed." (Baird, 2004, p. 271)

On a practical level, this perspective on gender equity in the workplace means that both men and women are provided with the necessary *opportunities* (expressed as support and conditions) to perform their jobs to the best of their ability. While this includes equal pay and access to employment, it also includes policies that recognise employees' roles as parents and as people, such as flexible working conditions.

As an *outcome* however, gender equity in the workplace (as the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (NACEW) suggests) may include the following indicators: good representation of men and women across different areas and levels of the workplace; the proportion of women in leadership roles is similar to that in other parts of the workplace; employees of both sexes are able to combine their work and family life; and all employees, whether full time or part time, have access to training and support that permits them to upskill as they see fit (NACEW, 2012). Ultimately, viewed as both

opportunity and outcome, gender equity in the workplace should mean that an individual's sex or parental status should not impact on their ability to perform in paid work, or to advance their careers.

1.4 Why study paid parental leave with respect to gender equity?

Parental leave is thought to impact on issues of gender equity in the workplace in a number of ways. Firstly, adequate parental leave can help to reduce the gender pay gap. If women can return to the same jobs they had prior to giving birth without fear of dismissal, advocates of paid parental leave argue this helps women to maintain career momentum, and to develop and maintain their work skills (Callister, 2002, p. 284). Maintaining career momentum in turn helps women to achieve the upper rungs of their professions, if they choose to do so (Jagose, 1994, p. 137). Additionally, job protection ensures that women can maintain their connection to the paid labour market, and are not forced either to leave it or to participate on a casual basis, in low-skilled jobs (NACEW, 2015). If parental leave is paid, women and their families also face less financial hardship as a result of taking leave (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 59).

Paid parental leave also has wider social benefits. If parental leave is gender neutral, and male partners are encouraged to take leave as well, then a more equal sharing of household responsibilities can result (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011). In particular, this increased sharing would mean that women are not always the parent taking time off work for family reasons, and thus removing any grounds for claims that women employees with children are “less committed” to their careers. In short, parenting becomes a less gendered activity (Callister & Galtry, 2006, p. 46), and both men and women are able to balance work and family more successfully. There is also some evidence that fathers who take longer paternity leave have greater involvement in childcare-related activities overall, while their children perform better in cognitive tests and are

better prepared to start school (del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013; New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 32).

Callister (2002) suggests that two things need to happen in order for women to achieve gender equity in the labour market. Firstly, women need to increase their hours of work and their participation in the labour market, and therefore their lifetime earnings; secondly, men need to undertake a greater share of the unpaid labour of childcare and housework, which may require a reduction in their working hours and/or income (Callister, 2002, p. 284). Parental leave can play a key role in achieving both these goals – however, Callister’s conception of gender equity in the workplace appears to be fairly narrow and defined by one key outcome, that of women’s ability to reach the upper rungs of their professions. This conception does not address other indicators of gender equity in the workplace – such as an equitable distribution of men and women across all levels of the business, support for employees, and the extent to which both men and women are able to successfully balance work and family (Massetot, 2013).

1.5 How much can paid parental leave affect gender equity in the workplace?

While it is clear that paid parental leave can have an impact on gender equity in the labour market, it has limits as a tool for examining issues of gender equity, because paid parental leave does not have a uniform impact on all women. In New Zealand, this is primarily because the legislative scheme is not universal. The legislation imposes employment requirements on women in order to be eligible for payments (currently they must have been employed for at least six months, for an average of ten hours a week, or have been self-employed for the same period and hours) ('Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act,' 1987, s 2BA). Individuals in a more precarious employment situation – such as employees who have more irregular hours, seasonal workers, new employees or the unemployed – may not be eligible under this scheme. A survey of 1000 new

mothers conducted in 2005 found that 43% were eligible for full paid parental leave, 13% were partially eligible for the payments only,¹ 11% had work patterns that disqualified them from paid parental leave, 6% were self-employed² and 27% were not employed (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 15) – however, it should be noted that the employment requirements have been broadened since this survey was conducted.

Paid parental leave can only impact on gender equity in the labour market insofar as women have access to this benefit. Limited provision of leave will have a correspondingly limited impact. In New Zealand, women who are eligible for paid parental leave tend to have higher incomes, and are more likely to be better educated and engaged in a professional occupation. By contrast, ineligible women tend to have fewer educational qualifications, lower incomes and less engagement with the formal labour market (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007). As I interview women who have received parental leave as part of this thesis, there is a corresponding bias in this research towards women of higher incomes and greater job security, who face different challenges in the labour market than women on lower incomes and/or less formal participation in the labour market.

The implications of this bias are that my findings cannot be generalised for New Zealand women, or indeed other sectors of the labour market. There are also other factors that contribute to the gender pay gap that the current New Zealand parental leave scheme is unable to impact, such as women's overrepresentation in casual work (Flynn & Harris, 2015). However, the aim of this study is to identify the impact that paid parental leave may have on issues of gender equity in the workplace, and to consider the arguments for the further extension of paid parental leave. The underlying premise of this thesis is that equal treatment and equality of opportunities between men and women within the workplace is essential to achieving substantive gender equity. In summary,

¹ An employee needs to have worked for the same employer for at least 6 months to be eligible for extended unpaid leave; if not, they will still be eligible for the payments if they have been in paid employment for the last 6 months.

² At the time of the New Zealand Department of Labour survey self-employed parents were not eligible to receive paid parental leave; this restriction was removed in 2006.

women should not be disadvantaged or discriminated against in the workforce because of their childbearing role and associated childcare responsibilities.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Having established the value of studying paid parental leave and its impact on gender equity as both equality of opportunities and outcomes in the workplace, and provided an overview of questions raised by the limited nature of New Zealand paid parental leave, I now outline how these questions will be addressed in the thesis.

I examine the impact of paid parental leave on gender equity in the New Zealand workplace by first discussing parental leave in chapter two with regards to different models of the welfare state. There is a wide variety of parental leave schemes globally, and I examine how this variation has arisen through reference to social movement theorists. This discussion highlights the various arguments that gave rise to the view that support ought to be granted to citizens in times of hardship, and how these ideas were extended to notions of support for the carers of young children. I use a parental leave typology proposed by Marian Baird (2004) and the welfare-state framework developed by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) to analyse the different forms of parental leave in existence in developed nations, identifying three central forms of parental leave: welfare-based parental leave, bargaining-based parental leave, and equity-based parental leave. This explanatory framework offers a great deal of insight into why parental leave schemes take the wide range of forms that they do, by illustrating how the framing of parental leave policy impacts on its final form, and provides a theoretical and comparative context for understanding New Zealand policy.

In my third chapter I examine the development of parental leave in New Zealand more closely, with reference to Baird (2004) and Esping-Andersen's (1990) frameworks. I look at three major legislative developments – the introduction of unpaid maternity leave in 1980, the extension to unpaid parental

leave covering both parents in 1987, and the introduction of paid parental leave in 2002. In each case I consider the socio-economic and political conditions and the prevailing debates associated with the drafting of the legislation, and the underlying goals of the legislation. My discussion then reviews the current legislation and considers how the current paid parental leave scheme has been implemented, by examining statistical records of uptake by each partner, average length of leave, and patterns of employment after childbirth. I also examine the current debates from a variety of sources – Parliamentary, governmental and extra-governmental – in order to gain insight into the framing of modern political debates in New Zealand around parental leave. This analysis shows that Baird's typology is a 'good fit' for the current New Zealand debate themes. I conclude that the objectives of gender equity do not occupy a prominent position in the current debate, and that the current paid parental leave legislation is still founded on a gender-based conception of what parenting is. This conclusion then leads to the question whether this limited model means the legislation is correspondingly having a limited impact on gender equity.

The fourth chapter provides the methodological framework for my primary research: a qualitative research study involving seven in-depth interviews with women discussing their experiences with receiving parental leave and attempting to re-enter the paid workforce. At this individual level, gender equity in the workplace might be demonstrated by: participants being able to work the hours that they want in order to balance their family life; being able to arrange their work in a flexible manner to accommodate family responsibilities; being supported by their employers if they wish to advance their careers through training and upskilling; and being able to reach leadership positions. I establish why qualitative research is particularly useful in this case, and discuss my participant selection methods.

The results of these interviews are presented in chapter five. I find that the prevailing feeling amongst participants is that parental leave, while certainly valuable in its financial support for young families and its protection of parents' jobs, does not have a lasting impact on issues of gender equity in the workplace. Instead, a supportive and flexible workplace is valued more highly by

participants when it comes to continuing their careers after having children. Further, participants felt that parenting was still regarded as primarily a mother's role in New Zealand: male partners were more likely to experience difficulties in balancing work and childcare responsibilities due to an inflexible employer, and there were differing societal attitudes towards the parenting roles of men and women.

The limitations and the implications of my findings are discussed in chapter 6. I compare my results to those of other surveys of parental leave in New Zealand, finding that my in-depth interview results are largely consistent with the existing literature, and conclude that the limited nature of New Zealand paid parental leave has a correspondingly limited impact on gender equity in the workplace. I then offer suggestions for what policy changes might have a more substantial impact, based on current proposed changes to the legislation, suggestions from participants in this study and overseas experiences. Finally, I evaluate my research as a whole, identifying areas for future research.

The discussion now turns to examining the emergence of parental leave policies, with an analysis of the varying justifications behind parental leave, and how that shapes the final schemes.

Chapter Two: The Different Models of Parental Leave

1. Introduction

In the first chapter I discussed the role of parental leave in achieving gender equity in the workplace. This chapter offers a closer review of the different forms of parental leave, and how these different forms are founded in different theoretical conceptions of the welfare state.

Globally there is a wide variation in parental leave policies, with broad differences in the eligibility requirements, duration of leave, and payments available (if any). Out of 185 countries surveyed by the International Labour Organisation in 2014, all countries offered some form of job protection for women after childbirth, and only three countries – Oman, Papua New Guinea and the United States – offered no cash benefits for this period (Addati et al., 2014, p. 16). The duration of leave varies from 60 days in Bahrain (Addati et al., 2014, p. 12) to 480 days in Sweden (Swedish Institute, 2016) and the amount of payments range from nil in the United States up to 100% of income in Norway (Addati et al., 2014, p. 28). While generally speaking more developed and prosperous countries offer more extensive parental leave, with the Scandinavian countries being the stereotypical example, this is not always the case: Bulgaria for example offers 58 weeks of maternity leave paid at 90% of the recipient's wages, while the United States offers no payments at the federal level and only 12 weeks of unpaid leave (OECD Family Database, 2015). So why does such variation exist, and what impact is this having on parents and their participation in the paid workforce?

1.1 Social movement theory

Theories about policy framing and how social movements are able to effect policy changes shed light on this question. “*Policy framing*” refers to how different participants in a policy debate frame a particular issue: what factors

participants stress as important, and how this emphasis shapes the resulting argument, a process that is often reflective of the participants' underlying values and belief systems (Schön & Rein, 1994, p. 23). McAdam et al further define this process as "the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action." (McAdam et al., 1996, p. 6)

The social movements that are participating, as well as the political context, further shape the policy outcome. Della Porta & Diani describe social movements as groups that have three key features in common: they are involved in conflict with clearly defined opponents; they are closely linked by informal networks; and they share a distinct identity (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 20). McAdam et al refer to these groups as *mobilizing structures*, the social vehicles through which people can engage in collective action; these can take the form of formal or informal groups, organisations and social networks (McAdam et al., 1996, p. 3).

However, to effect policy change the social movements must be able to successfully interact with the political institutions. Della Porta & Diani label this feature as '*political opportunity structures*', or the extent to which a social movement is able to interact with established political actors, or 'policy entrepreneurs', in order to effect change (Della Porta & Diani, 1999, p. 9). McAdam et al specifically note the opportunities that times of political and socio-economic change may bring about for such actors (McAdam et al., 1996, p. 3), also known as the *political context*.

So how might these processes play out in terms of parental leave outcomes? Most notably, there are several different ways of 'framing' political debates around parental leave, and the 'problem' that parental leave is attempting to solve. While at the fundamental level few would argue that women are best served by allowing them time off work to recover from childbirth, to bond with their infants and to establish breastfeeding (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, pp. 29-31), there are many other considerations when it comes to setting the parameters of parental leave.

Firstly, protecting women's jobs while they take time off is clearly important: it allows them to maintain their connection to the labour market and sustain their careers, skills and economic independence (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, pp. 29-31). But for how long should women be able to take paid leave? If the duration of leave is too short it may endanger infant health, and not allow women to fully recover from childbirth or to spend as much time with their babies as they wish. However, too long a duration of leave (over twelve months) has been associated with disengagement from the workforce and declining career prospects for women. Long durations of leave also go against the interests of employers, who have an incentive to minimise the cost and disruption to their business of employees taking parental leave, particularly where leave is employer-funded (Addati et al., 2014, p. 8).

The amount of payments, as well as who pays, is also disputed. Many countries pay parental leave as a form of social security, funded through taxation. This model recognises parental leave as something of fundamental benefit to society, in that children are better cared for and gender equity in the labour market is promoted (Callister, 2002, p. 283). However, there is also an argument that paid parental leave should be employer-funded, offered as part of a remuneration package. But this policy approach tends to unfairly advantage highly paid, highly skilled women; it places lower-income female earners in a more vulnerable position, relying on their bargaining power to ensure their continued access to parental leave. Arguably it also creates a disincentive for employers to hire women of childbearing age (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 57). Government-funded paid parental leave also has drawbacks, as coverage is rarely universal; in order to reduce total costs most schemes will exclude some sectors of workers, such as temporary or casual employees, or the self-employed. Payments are also usually not overly generous (Baird, 2004, p. 266).

Finally, there is the question of whether both parents/caregivers of a child should be entitled to leave. On the one hand, women's unique reproductive role in society ought to be recognised by prioritising mothers in parental leave eligibility (Baird, 2004, p. 271). However, there is also some evidence that giving

fathers or other primary caregivers more parental leave results in wider responsibility for childcare, leading to greater equity in both the home and in the workplace (Addati et al., 2014, p. 52; Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011) and better outcomes for children (del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013).

1.2 Models of Paid Parental Leave

How a country seeks to resolve these policy dilemmas is rooted largely in political values and beliefs regarding the role of the welfare state, and how best to support the vulnerable in society. In other words, the *political context* plays a significant role in determining the final outcomes of parental leave policies, as do the *social movements* that are active at the time. To demonstrate the resulting different approaches to welfare that countries may take, Gøsta Esping-Andersen developed a framework of three different forms of welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 26 – see also figure 2.1). The first model is that of the *liberal welfare state*, where welfare provisions are minimal; they are aimed at the most needy in society and are designed to incentivise work over welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 26). This model is evident in countries such as the United States, Australia and arguably New Zealand (Callister, 2002, p. 280). The second welfare state model identified by Esping-Andersen is *conservatist and corporatist welfare states*, where welfare benefits are funded by employees' social insurance contributions. As such, welfare is closely tied to the individual's role in the labour market; non-working women typically have little or no access to welfare, and the traditional breadwinner/homemaker dynamic is reinforced (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 27). Countries in this welfare state category include France and Germany. The third welfare state category in this typology is the *social democratic welfare state*. This model perceives equality of opportunity amongst citizens as the primary goal to be achieved via welfare. Consequently, benefits and rights are publicly funded and universal in coverage (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 27). Traditionally the Scandinavian countries have supported this form of welfare state.

Parental leave in the welfare orientation is generally reflective of a country's overall approach to welfare and social security. However, it should also be noted

that Esping-Andersen's categorisation is centred around a male worker (Lewis, 1993, p. 14). Therefore, parental leave, due to its gendered nature, may be treated differently to other forms of welfare provisions, and other factors may be important. For example, a society's ideas about the extent to which women are expected to participate in the labour market, or whether their chief role ought to be that of homemaker and mother, may also help to shape parental leave policies.

In order to address these gendered dimensions of parental leave more closely, Marian Baird developed a typology for analysing the debates around parental leave (Baird, 2004) which can be seen as closely linked to Esping-Andersen's typology (see figure 2.2). Baird identified three different parental leave 'orientations', each of which provides a different policy frame for parental leave. The *welfare orientation* views parental leave as a form of social welfare aimed at protecting the vulnerable members of society, the 'vulnerable' in this case being young families. The *bargaining orientation* frames parental leave in terms of workers' rights and therefore something to be bargained for with employers; and the related *business orientation* focuses on the needs of the business, and the benefits for business of offering paid parental leave. Baird's bargaining and welfare 'orientations' are similar to Esping-Andersen's conservatist/corporatist and liberal welfare states respectively. Additionally, Baird proposes the need for a new *equity orientation*, akin to Esping-Andersen's social democratic welfare state, with the key difference being Baird's recognition of women's unique position in the labour market (whereas Esping-Andersen's model was implicitly based on a male worker). This orientation takes as its main focus the role that parental leave plays in helping women to achieve gender equity in the workplace, and advocates for a universal and generous allowance; without specific recognition of women's unique reproductive role and how this interacts with their productive role, true equality cannot be achieved (Baird, 2004, pp. 270-271).

Baird's typology, while useful for explaining the variations in parental leave schemes, does fail to consider another key justification for parental leave: that of child-centred concerns for infant health and wellbeing (although it could be

argued that it is included under the welfare orientation). As will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, child health has been a significant argument in favour of extended parental leave, particularly in New Zealand. Longer periods of parental leave are associated with improved infant health and decreased infant mortality, and it has also been suggested that mothers returning to work sooner may result in poorer cognitive development and behavioural problems in their children (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, pp. 31-32).

While few would argue that the welfare of children is not vitally important when it comes to determining the appropriate length of parental leave, this thesis focuses on the impact of parental leave on gender equity in the workplace, an issue that chiefly affects parents and their working lives. Baird's typology is particularly useful in analysing this impact because it focuses specifically on the ways in which parental leave policies are shaped by how society and businesses view the role of mothers and of women in the workforce.

Therefore, this chapter critically evaluates different parental leave policies using Baird's typology as a framework and with reference to social movement theory. I look at the foundations of the welfare, bargaining and equity orientations, and what the resulting parental leave schemes look like in a selection of countries, as well as the extent of its potential impact on gender equity in the workplace. It should be noted that few parental leave policies fit neatly into one category or another: typically there is overlap (as can be seen in my discussion of Australia parental leave in both the welfare and bargaining orientations). However, examining each parental leave orientation in turn provides valuable insight into the history, justifications, and political debates around parental leave.

Figure 2.1 Esping-Andersen's welfare state framework

	Liberal welfare state	Conservatist /corporatist welfare state	Social democratic welfare state
Framing processes	Stigmatisation of welfare recipients Emphasis on returning to work Only the most needy are 'deserving' of welfare	Traditional family dynamics Women in their traditional roles as mothers and homemakers	Equality –both between genders and across all of society Government intervention is necessary & desirable to achieve social goals
Social movements	Business advocacy organisations	Trade unions Groups supporting child & mother health e.g. breastfeeding advocacy groups	Feminist groups
Political institutions	Governments may be influenced by neoliberal paradigm	Governments looking to boost population – e.g. post-war Europe	Social democratic governments
Example states	United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand	Austria, France, Germany, Italy	Norway, Sweden, Denmark

Figure 2.2 Baird's Typology of Parental Leave Debates (Baird, 2004, p. 269)

	Welfare orientation	Bargaining orientation	Business orientation	New equity orientation
Dominant discourse	Domesticity, mother & child health, family fertility, population	Employment entitlement, working condition, industrial right	Business case, competitive advantage, added value, 'bottom line'	Social justice, equality, fairness, women's rights
Principal agency	Paternalist government	Unions, industrial tribunals	HR manager, employers	Progressive government, women's groups, unions, business
Primary mechanism	Welfare legislation	Bargaining, arbitration, enterprise agreements, awards	Managerial prerogative, company policy	Equity or industrial legislation
Expected outcomes	Partial coverage, minimum/flat amount, women's economic dependence remains	Partial coverage, income replacement, contingent on bargaining power, variable provisions	Partial coverage, income replacement, contingent on employee value, variable provisions	Universal coverage for working women, income replacement, economic and career security

2. The Welfare Orientation

2.1 How is parental leave framed in the welfare orientation?

Parental leave in the welfare orientation is framed in a debate about domesticity, mother and child health, family, fertility, and population (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 200). Parental leave acts to support women's reproductive role in society, but not necessarily their productive role. Women are seen as secondary income earners in the family, therefore paid parental leave is likely to be minimal, if it is available at all. In determining the appropriate length of leave, the health of mother and child is prioritised over factors such as mothers retaining their connection to the labour force (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 202); therefore, gender inequities in the labour market may persist under such a parental leave scheme. A parental leave scheme that is based on the welfare model will have as its primary objective encouraging women to bear children and to become homemakers, as well as promoting the health of infants. As such, mobilizing structures that are active in the welfare orientation may include groups supporting infant and child wellbeing, such as breastfeeding advocacy groups or child protection agencies. Political opportunities for change may occur if the state wishes to increase population growth, or alternatively to improve the health and wellbeing of children. The scheme will also generally be funded via payments from the state; alternatively, male workers may receive tax rebates or allowances to support them in their role as breadwinner (Baird, 2004, p. 265).

2.2 Parental leave provisions in early welfare states

The welfare-oriented approach can be seen clearly in the earliest examples of parental leave. Germany was one of the first nations to enact parental leave legislation in 1877, requiring working women to take three weeks of mandatory leave after giving birth. This leave was part of a pattern of social policies enacted at the time (Demleitner, 1992, p. 242). Demleitner argues that this requirement (women had no choice whether to take the leave) is a paternalistic model that regards infant health as more important than the wishes or needs of the mother

to return to work. Switzerland also enacted maternity leave legislation in 1877, requiring mothers to take leave for two weeks before and six weeks after giving birth (Callister & Galtry, 2006, p. 38). These enactments also owed something to the gradual emergence of the first wave of feminism: while chiefly focused on issues such as women's suffrage and girls' education, the movement also demanded labour rights for women due to an increasing number of women participating in the workforce (Grimshaw, 1987, p. 17).

The first recognition of parental leave as a workplace entitlement, by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3) was also framed in welfare-oriented terms. Notably, a woman "shall not be permitted to work during the six weeks following her confinement" (article 3(a)); and "shall...be paid benefits sufficient for the full and healthy maintenance of herself and her child" (article 3(c)). It should also be noted that although one of the founding principles of the ILO itself was the protection of women, children and young persons, it did not make any provision for the actual participation of women in the organisation (Vapnek, 2014, p. 160) – this omission suggests that women were valued primarily for their reproductive capabilities, rather than their productive role in the labour force. Nevertheless, this development demonstrated the further integration of parental leave into basic labour law and rights.

Early French legislation offers another example of a welfare-oriented approach to parental leave. The first maternity leave legislation, enacted in 1913, was primarily driven by a high infant mortality rate and a desire to increase population. Therefore, policymakers reached the conclusion that an enforced leave period for mothers after giving birth was the best way to promote infant survival (McDougall, 1983, p. 80). Indeed, the need to grow the population, and therefore the valuing of women's reproductive role in society over their productive role, was a prominent policy frame in the early development of France's family policies: the need to rebuild the French population and society after the devastation of World War II resulted in a family policy that sought to promote women as homemakers, giving an allowance to

women who had more than one child and who stayed at home to look after them (Hantrais, 1993, pp. 119-120).

2.3 The welfare orientation in contemporary discourse

The welfare orientation is less prominent in modern discourse. As more and more women have entered the workforce, and domestic labour and childcare has become less exclusively female, justifications for parental leave schemes are correspondingly less likely to overtly promote the traditional breadwinner/homemaker dynamic, or to emphasise the importance of reproduction to society – women are now more often seen as workers in their own right (Lewis, 1996, p. 2). Consequently, arguments for parental leave are now more commonly framed around equity-related issues, such as the protection of parents' jobs, promoting women's participation in the paid labour force, and protecting family incomes. The welfare orientation is still evident in the way that many parental leave advocates today will place emphasis on infant health and wellbeing, and the health benefits of breastfeeding (Morris-Travers, 2016). But the more traditional ideas of the welfare orientation – namely, values of traditional family and motherhood – are still in existence as a background theme. The recent Australian proposal to extend its paid parental leave scheme offers an example of this theme, and is particularly interesting in terms of how policymakers chose to frame their proposals.

Australia's proposal, first put forward in 2013, surprised many people because of its generosity from a conservative and not overly female-friendly government – mothers would have received six months of full pay up to a cap of \$150,000 annually (later reduced to \$100,000 before the plan was scrapped) (Kenny, 2014). By comparison, the existing scheme offers a flat rate of the national full-time minimum wage for 18 weeks (Australian Department of Social Services, 2014, p. 21). The then Prime Minister of Australia, Tony Abbott, the key driver behind the proposed scheme, framed the scheme in the following terms:

“We do not educate women to higher degree level to deny them a career. If we want women of that calibre to have families, and we should, well we have to give them a fair dinkum chance to do so. That is what this scheme of paid parental leave is all about.” (Medhora, 2015)

It should be noted that the proposed scheme would have disproportionately benefitted women on higher wages, who would have received 100% of their pay up to the cap, while women earning less than the full-time minimum wage would have been worse off, as they would have previously been bumped up to the flat rate (Summers, 2014). Therefore, it is possible to view the proposed scheme as directly targeting women of higher income and ‘calibre’ in order to encourage them to have families, rather than a genuine sense of concern for the financial instability childbearing brings to many families. As such, the proposal may be seen as an attempted form of social engineering, not dissimilar to that used in European countries post-World War II (Hantrais, 1993, pp. 119-120). McCurdy (2014) suggests that the plan was partly a knee-jerk reaction to the perception of Tony Abbott as a misogynist by the Australian public (McCurdy, 2014, p. 6). Moreover, the plan’s failure to provide any additional leave for fathers did nothing to challenge the traditional ‘breadwinner and homemaker’ dynamic in Australian society, and suggested that the proposed scheme was based on “a very narrow and outdated view of women and girls as mothers and carers first, and meaningful contributors to the paid labour market second.” (McCurdy, 2014, p. 6)

In summary, the welfare orientation places at its heart values of domesticity and fertility, with child health and wellbeing a high priority. Women’s participation in the paid labour market is not a central goal, and consequently gender equity in the workplace may suffer if paid parental leave is oriented solely along welfare lines.

3. The Bargaining Orientation

3.1 How is parental leave framed in the bargaining orientation?

In the bargaining orientation, parental leave is framed as an industrial right attached to employment (Baird, 2004, p. 266). This approach means that the existence of parental leave is dependent on factors such as bargaining power, political conditions and socio-economic context. The mobilizing structures active in the bargaining orientation are typically trade unions and other employee organisations. The bargaining orientation places more emphasis on women as active participants in the labour force than does the welfare model, and does not reduce them to their reproductive role. However, coverage of parental leave schemes may vary widely, can be traded off for other benefits and may not recognise the unique necessity of parental leave for women in particular: parental leave may be treated in a similar way to annual leave or other benefits, as a privilege and not a right (Baird, 2004, p. 267). The political opportunity for change may be greatest at times of labour shortages.

Baird also identifies a separate business orientation. This business orientation is closely related to the bargaining orientation insofar as neither model frames parental leave as an inherent right, but rather as a work-related 'benefit', and both are closely linked to the economic and industrial conditions of the time. The main difference in the business orientation is that parental leave is determined by the employer, rather than as a result of industrial bargaining or pressure – the balance of power lies solely with the employer. As such, while the political opportunity for change may be similar (i.e. labour shortages), the mobilizing structures are quite different, consisting instead of individual employers. Baird argues that this approach differs from the bargaining orientation in that the chief focus is on the interests of businesses and employers, rather than workers – for example, the value of retaining highly skilled employees through their childbearing years, or encouraging women into the workforce during times of labour shortages. Much like bargaining-oriented leave, employers can be seen as having the primary responsibility to provide parental leave, rather than government (Baird, 2004, p. 268).

For the purposes of this chapter the industrial and business orientations will be examined together. The business orientation can best be seen as a variation

on the industrial orientation. However, both orientations are still closely tied to the interests of business, and both bring up issues such as the variations in parental leave coverage between different women and different industries.

3.2 History of bargaining-oriented parental leave

While the International Labour Organisation may have framed its original maternal leave provisions in somewhat paternalistic terms, the very fact that it was the ILO who did so is evidence of the recognition of maternity leave as an industrial right. Despite this formal recognition, the male-dominated nature of unions and industrial organisations meant that historically, parental leave has not always been high on the agenda at the bargaining table. In consequence, for the majority of women, parental leave based on legislation and public policy was – and frequently still is – their main source of support (Baird, 2004, p. 266).

There was even a concern amongst male workers that embracing women within the union movement might serve to undercut the male wage, regarded as the ‘family wage’ (Chamberlayne, 1993, p. 178). However, a combination of a growing number of women in the workforce and the impact of the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s meant that women became more prominent in unions, and consequently parental leave became a more common benefit in employment packages (Chamberlayne, 1993, p. 178).

One of the central problems for women of the bargaining-oriented approach is that the coverage of any scheme is dependent upon the bargaining strength of unions (and potentially individuals depending on the economic context). Consequently, coverage is usually far from universal. It has been noted that prior to the introduction of legislative parental leave in Australia, the availability of parental leave varied not only between industries but even within individual businesses, with more highly skilled individuals in whom companies had invested more time and resources more likely to have parental leave entitlements available to them than lower-paid colleagues (Baird et al., 2002, p. 4).

The bargaining orientation illustrates a frequent pattern in the area of parental leave of lower income, lower skilled women being the first to miss out on parental leave. This issue is not limited to parental leave won through industrial bargaining: parental leave legislation frequently places employment requirements on recipients, meaning that part-time and/or casual workers, despite being most in need of the payments, are the most likely to miss out. The result is a stratification of leave, and an inequitable outcome for women in the paid labour market (Baird et al., 2002, pp. 14-15).

3.3 The bargaining orientation in contemporary discourse

Employment agreement-based parental leave is prevalent in the United States, as at the federal level it does not offer any form of cash payments for parental leave, making it the only nation in the OECD not to do so (Addati et al., 2014, p. 16). It does offer unpaid statutory leave of up to twelve weeks (Kamerman & Gatenio, 2002, p. 1). There are significant limitations placed on this leave, however: it is only available to employees of organisations with more than 50 permanent employees; employees may be required to use annual or sick leave for all or part of the period; and the organisation can deny leave to its highest-paid 10% of staff (Saypoff, 2012, p. 284). The assumption is that any other leave a parent may require must be contracted between the individual and the employer.

Individual states also have the discretion to extend the minimum statutory entitlements, but this results in far from full coverage. Only a quarter of employers offer fully paid maternity leave, and a fifth offer none at all. When these variations are coupled with the fact that 40% of workers are not eligible for the statutory leave component, it means that a significant portion of workers in the US have no access to parental leave at all (Ray et al., 2008, p. 1), demonstrating the chief failure of using a bargaining-centric approach to parental leave: lack of cover. The implications are that the many women who have no access to parental leave may have difficulty maintaining their engagement with the paid labour market and their career trajectory during their childbearing years, thus maintaining gender inequities – such as a

disproportionate number of women in low-skilled or temporary work, and an absence of women in leadership positions – in the workplace.

Prior to the introduction of legislated paid parental leave in 2011, Australian parents also needed to negotiate with their employers in order to obtain paid leave. However, the coverage that resulted was again far from universal. A survey conducted in 2006 concluded that for large organisations of 100 employees or more, fewer than 50% of businesses provided paid parental leave. The retail and hospitality industries in particular had provided only limited parental leave (industries with a predominantly female and low-paid workforce). Further, in the area of enterprise bargaining – the process of negotiation between employers, employees, and employees' representatives such as trade unions – only 16% of the resulting private sector agreements included paid parental leave (Baird, 2011, p. 3748), indicating that paid parental leave was not a high priority for groups undertaking bargaining. Additionally, the Australian government at the time had a policy of leaving all family-related work policies up to the individual employee and employer to negotiate, as well as an overriding policy of individualising the employment relationship, with the erosion of the power of collectively bargained agreements (Baird, 2011, pp. 3746-3747). Therefore, not only was it difficult for women to get the issues of parental leave on the agenda for employment bargaining in the first place, the power of the bargaining groups was diminished.

The Australian example demonstrates the importance of the political context when it comes to bargaining-oriented parental leave: the individualisation of employment agreements, and the resulting disempowerment of unions, meant that low-paid employees, who were more likely to rely on union awards (Baird et al., 2009, p. 395), missed out. Bargaining-oriented parental leave is an especially precarious form of support for low-paid women in predominantly 'female' industries and/or low-paid roles.

3.4 Parental leave in the interests of business

While parental leave provisions offered by an employer will often be a result of union bargaining, employers may also offer leave of their own accord due to the potential business benefits: specifically, a more family-friendly business is more likely to retain its skilled female employees throughout their childbearing years, reducing the costs of staff turnover and training new employees, and increasing employee loyalty (Baird et al., 2002, p. 14). However, similar limitations apply as in the pure bargaining approach. In short, there is little incentive for businesses to provide parental leave to individuals in low-skilled jobs, except in times of severe labour shortages. Rather, parental leave, according to this paradigm, is a 'special award', part of a remuneration package (Baird, 2004, p. 268). If the leave is not enshrined in an employment agreement, but treated as an additional benefit, then it may easily be taken back. Socio-economic conditions may also impact what women do with the leave that is available to them: if the economy is weak and unemployment is high, they may cut their leave short for fear a prolonged period of leave might endanger their jobs, even if they are statutorily protected (Saypoff, 2012, p. 292). Therefore, parental leave obtained under the business orientation is one of the most 'vulnerable' forms of parental leave, and is highly subject to the social and political context of the times.

Arguably gender equity considerations can be included in the business case – for example, if a business offering paid parental leave is motivated by its desire to retain its highly skilled female employees, then the business could be seen as implicitly recognising the necessity of ensuring that female employees' careers are not unfairly disadvantaged because of their gender. Many employers who offer extended parental leave do promote themselves as being forward thinkers in this regard (Clement, 2015; Scoop Business, 2016). But the gender equity benefits may be a 'happy coincidence' in terms of the intended outcomes of paid parental leave; and if leave is restricted to highly paid, highly skilled employees, this orientation creates and maintains a stratification of leave, and a distinct lack of equity amongst women.

The bargaining/business orientations are closely linked to an individual's position in the labour market. The chief flaws of this approach are its lack of

universal coverage, as the fact that it can be traded away for other benefits, and is reliant on a benevolent employer, who may choose to award paid parental leave only to its most highly performing employees, can result in a stratification of leave.

4. The Equity Orientation

4.1 How is parental leave framed in the equity orientation?

In response to the problems inherent in the parental leave approaches outlined above when it comes to promoting gender equity in the workplace, Baird proposes an additional 'equity orientation'. She grounds this approach in social feminism, which holds that the recognition of women's additional roles as wives and mothers is key to ensuring their equitable participation in the paid labour market (Baird, 2004, p. 271). Paid parental leave is framed as being a key tool for promoting the rights of women and gender equity, particularly within the workplace. Therefore, parental leave ought to be universal and generous, involving income replacement and job security (Baird, 2004, p. 270). This paradigm recognises the inherent inequality between men and women resulting from the biological realities of pregnancy and childbirth, and acknowledges that this inequality must be addressed. Parental leave is not regarded as 'special treatment', as it is so often in the other orientations; rather, parental leave acknowledges the fundamental rights of women both to produce and reproduce, and seeks to redress the work-family tension that often results (Baird, 2004, p. 271). Baird's conception of the equity orientation is largely prescriptive, as she details what form the 'ideal' parental leave scheme would take; however, elements of the equity orientation are visible in existing parental leave schemes.

Notable mobilizing structures in the equity orientation may include feminist groups, and groups that promote the participation of women in employment and business. Political opportunities for such changes may be provided if labour shortages mean that a government wishes to encourage women to enter and stay

in the paid workforce. Alternatively, extensive parental leave may be regarded as a political objective by a government committed to gender equality.

This particular framing of parental leave is especially relevant to the central question of this thesis, namely the extent to which New Zealand paid parental leave policies promote gender equity in the workplace. If Baird's thesis that other forms of parental leave have only a limited and uneven impact on gender equity (Baird, 2004, p. 270) is correct, then the extent to which the current New Zealand legislation conforms to either the equity orientation or some other orientation will shed light on what its ultimate impact on gender equity is likely to be.

4.2 Paid parental leave and women's right to work

Women's right to work is fundamental to the concept of gender equity: this right allows them to become economically independent from men. Economic independence provides them with a source of support for themselves and their children, for example if relationships break down or partners die. Employment allows women to gain skills, knowledge and expertise that foster self-confidence and enable women to play important roles both in their communities and in the workplace (UN Women, 2012, p. 3). Additionally, promoting the employment of women has positive flow-on effects for society, the economy, and family wellbeing (Baird, 2004, p. 270). There is a body of evidence which shows that as women's incomes rise a range of positive effects occur, including better nutrition and education for children, and greater decision-making roles for women in their communities (UN Women, 2012, p. 3).

This basic right to work is recognised in Article 23(1) of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights – “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.” (UN Women, 2012) The specific right of women to employment is further acknowledged in Article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 1948). Thus, equity-oriented parental leave serves both to recognise this fundamental right of

women to work, and to acknowledge their unique reproductive role in society. Within this paradigm, parental leave policies are universal in coverage and generous, ensuring that women can take adequate leave and that their families do not suffer undue hardship as a result of doing so.

4.3 The equity orientation in contemporary discourse

International arguments in favour of parental leave tend to focus more on maternal and infant health, and job protection (Addati, 2015, p. 71). Protecting women's jobs is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of redressing the gender inequity resulting from childbearing. However, simple protection of employment is not the whole picture, and even where women's jobs are protected, inequality in the workplace and in the home may continue to exist. Baird's vision of equitable parental leave therefore goes beyond simple job protection, prescribing universal and generous paid maternity leave. Australia's current parental leave scheme perhaps comes the closest to matching this vision, with a universal payment of the full time minimum wage for six months. However, as highlighted in the previous discussion of Australia's parental leave debates, the outcome of this policy is far from equitable.

One flaw in using Baird's typology is that it is solely focused on maternity leave, and does not include any discussion of paid paternity leave. The problem inherent in this approach is that it ignores the significant impact that paid paternity leave can have on gender equity. In countries where substantive gender equity is recognised as a desirable goal to be achieved by a parental leave scheme, targeted parental leave for male partners is a popular way of achieving this goal. An estimated 70 countries out of 167 surveyed by the ILO provided some form of paid paternity leave (Addati et al., 2014, pp. 52-57). The underlying premise is that promoting parental leave for fathers (or other carers) will ensure two things. Firstly, fathers and carers will take a more equal role in parenting responsibilities – if their involvement with their children is promoted and normalised from birth, this relationship is likely to continue throughout their children's upbringing (del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013). Thus, women are not unequally burdened with childcare responsibilities that may jeopardise their

career trajectories over that of their male colleagues. Secondly, fathers taking time off work to care for children increasingly becomes the norm rather than the exception, helping to dispel the myth that they are less committed to and interested in their parenting responsibilities, as well as the idea that only women are likely to take time off work to care for children (Ekberg et al., 2013, p. 132).

While most parental leave schemes either award the bulk of paid leave specifically to mothers, or are structured around the assumption that mothers will take the majority of the leave, there have been some shifts towards a more equitable distribution between parents/carers. The United Kingdom recently extended total available parental leave to 50 weeks, of which 39 weeks is paid leave, which may be shared between partners as they choose. However, policymakers were uncertain how many partners would actually take advantage of this extension; the UK government estimated that only between 2% and 6% of fathers would take any additional leave (Sinclair, 2015). There were suggestions that fathers were nervous about the potential effect on their careers and status at work if they took extended parental leave (Heighton, 2014).

In order to redress this reluctance of men to take parental leave, some countries have implemented specifically targeted paternity leave. Sweden has had shared parental leave for a longer period, and regards shared leave as an important factor in the achievement of gender equity, minimising career disruption for women and helping to achieve a more equal distribution of household labour (Ekberg et al., 2013, p. 132). The current scheme, introduced in 1995, provides a total of 390 days of paid leave per child, with 60 days reserved for each parent on a 'use-it-or-lose-it' basis, with the remainder 270 days to be shared between them. There is currently a proposal to extend this to 90 days of reserved leave, due to concerns that fathers are not taking enough of the discretionary leave (Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2015).

However, there is mixed evidence regarding how effective targeted paternity leave is in encouraging fathers to take a more active parenting role. An evaluation of the present Swedish scheme carried out in 2013 found that while fathers took considerably more leave once the reserved months were introduced, there was no evidence that this increased their overall share of

childcare responsibilities (this was determined by days taken off work to care for sick children, for which special leave is also granted) (Ekberg et al., 2013). These findings would suggest that paid paternity leave in and of itself has had little impact on issues of gender inequity in the household. However, a similar study carried out in Norway assessed the effect of the introduction of 4 weeks non-transferable leave for fathers in 1993, and reached different conclusions (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011). (Norwegian fathers' leave has since been extended up to 10 weeks, in 2009.) The study interviewed parents on the subject of division of, and conflict over, household tasks, and found that couples were more likely to report a more equal sharing of household tasks after the introduction of the fathers' leave, and less conflict. However, the authors point out that it is difficult to establish whether these findings are primarily due to increased parental leave, or to changing attitudes towards gender roles in society generally (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011, p. 1620).

A study analysing data from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Denmark also found that fathers who take a longer period of paternity leave continue to engage in a greater share of childcare-related activities while their children are young (del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013, p. 4). These findings suggest that a longer period of paternity leave may help to redress the gender inequity when it comes to the sharing of childcare. There was also some evidence that the children of these highly-involved fathers had better cognitive outcomes (del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013, p. 39); and another report suggests that fathers who are more involved in their children's lives report greater life satisfaction and better physical and mental health (OECD Policy Brief, 2016).

These conflicting results indicate that while paternity leave is not a quick fix for the gender inequity in the workplace that results from childbearing, it undoubtedly has benefits and would likely facilitate cultural change. For any country that is considering introducing targeted paternity leave, there is also the tricky question of whether women ought to receive more leave because of their unique reproductive role and the necessity of recognising that, as Baird suggests. While it is vital that women have sufficient leave available to them to enable them to recover from childbirth and establish breastfeeding (Baird et al., 2002, p.

16), how long this leave ought to be is a difficult question, and raises the issue of whether such special recognition would unfairly 'lock' women into the role of primary carer for their children. Thus, efforts to target the gender inequity that can arise from childbearing also need to focus on encouraging fathers to take leave, as discussed above.

These questions over the appropriate allocation of leave between partners can also be regarded as a clash of political 'frames', and leading from this, a difference in how the central 'problem' regarding parental leave is constructed (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, pp. 74-75). Baird developed her parental leave orientations in Australia at a time when the only paid leave available was through employment agreements. In such a system, the central 'problem' is the lack of availability of parental leave for women, and therefore she emphasises the necessity of parental leave being universal and generous in order to resolve the gender inequities in the labour market that result from childbearing (Baird, 2004, p. 270). However, where paid parental leave is more widely available – for example, through a legislative scheme – then the problem is often framed differently. More specifically, the discussion may turn to the way in which women being framed as primary caregivers and men as secondary caregivers impacts negatively on women's position in the labour market, and the way in which female-specific parental leave reinforces this status (Ekberg et al., 2013).

The equity-oriented parental leave approach arguably offers the most promise when it comes to resolving issues of gender equity in the workplace that arise from having children. However, it has had somewhat mixed results in those countries where it has been applied, and there is some debate around the appropriate amount of leave to grant to partners and fathers.

5. Summary

Parental leave, like other forms of public policy, is the production of a unique set of framing processes, mobilizing structures and political contexts. Baird's

typology helps to illustrate the factors behind the variations in parental leave policies, both those included in employment contracts and those in government legislation. It also demonstrates the conflicting and complicated agendas behind such policies. A parental leave scheme may take a very different shape, depending on which underlying purpose policy-makers align themselves with, and how they frame the problem that parental leave is meant to solve. Consequently, parental leave's outcomes may also vary widely, including its impact on gender equity in the workplace.

While Baird posits the equity orientation as the seemingly ideal solution for resolving the discrepancies inherent in the other orientations (Baird, 2004, p. 270), she fails to address whether such a piece of policy could actually be effective in changing such deeply entrenched societal ideas as the role of women in childcare and in the workplace. The policies that attempt to make such a change – notably extended parental leave for partners and fathers – have had mixed success. However, the limited timeframes that such policies have been in force for could suggest that change on this level *is* achievable, but simply requires more time.

Discussion of Baird's parental leave orientations leads to the question of what orientation New Zealand's parental leave best fits into, and whether Baird and Esping-Andersen's typologies, or theories of social movements, are able to shed light on its relatively slow development and limited scope. Hence, the next chapter will focus on the development and current framework of parental leave in New Zealand, in light of the issues discussed above. I will examine its development, including the social and political background, in an attempt to answer why the legislation has taken longer to develop, and why it takes the current form that it does. I will apply the typologies of Esping-Andersen and Baird to the New Zealand legislation, as well as look at how it is currently functioning, to shed light on what the current impact of New Zealand paid parental leave on gender equity is. I will also identify the central goals of the current legislation, New Zealand parental leave policy, and the current themes in the modern debates around parental leave. This will help me to identify the

factors that have helped to shape these policies, and critically, the extent to which they have been designed to promote gender equity in the workplace.

Chapter Three: Parental Leave Legislation in New Zealand – History and Current Debates

In this chapter I will consider the development of the current New Zealand parental leave legislation in light of the typologies outlined in chapter two. My central argument in the first section is that the New Zealand legislation appears to be positioned largely in the business orientation model identified by Baird (2004) but with a relatively conservative understanding of ‘family’ and social policy, that consequently limits its impact on gender equity. I then evaluate how the present New Zealand legislation is functioning. Finally, I examine the various contemporary debates around paid parental leave policies, both within and outside Parliament, to highlight the ongoing discussions about the legitimate purpose of parental leave in New Zealand society. I conclude that achieving gender equity in the workplace is currently not a high priority for policymakers: instead, the discourse regarding parental leave is posited as a clash between the themes of child health and welfare, and the interests of business and employers. Consequently, there are no current proposals to introduce parental leave-related policies targeted at gender equity issues.

Paid parental leave in New Zealand is currently a highly prominent political issue. In the period of writing this thesis a Bill to extend paid leave to six months has been defeated in Parliament, then re-introduced with some alterations, and is currently before the Select Committee (Smallman, 2016). Meanwhile, the Government has extended paid leave from 14 to 16 weeks, and to 18 weeks from 1st April 2016 (New Zealand National Party, 2015), along with extensions of payments for parents of premature babies, increased eligibility for casual and temporary workers, and the introduction of ‘keeping in touch’ days (New Zealand Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2016). Therefore, all information relating to the ‘Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act’ 1987 is correct as of 1 April 2016.

1. Introduction

New Zealand has historically lagged behind the majority of OECD countries with regards to legislating parental leave; it was not until 1980 that unpaid maternity leave was enacted. By the time NZ enacted paid parental leave in 2002, only Australia and the United States also lacked any kind of paid leave in the OECD (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 197). The reasons for this delay are complex, and embedded in the socio-economic and political environments of the time.

In the first part of this chapter I argue that the development of parental leave legislation in New Zealand can be split into three distinct stages (see figure 3.1). The first period, from 1980-1990, saw the initial introduction of parental leave legislation in the form of the 'Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act' 1980 (MLEPA), which awarded women 26 weeks of unpaid leave and job protection. This was followed by the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act' 1987 (PLEPA), which extended the leave period to 1 year of unpaid leave that women could share with their partners. This period was characterised by a strong and well-organised women's movement in New Zealand, which helped to push for parental leave while contesting conservative ideas of the nuclear family and the welfare state – gender equity was one of the driving purposes behind the MLEPA. These years also featured a growing recognition and institutionalisation of women's interests by the state.

The second phase, from 1990-1999, was a phase of stagnation; no changes to parental leave occurred in this time. This lack of progress can be chiefly attributed to cuts to the welfare state made by the National government in this period, and an increasing fragmentation of the New Zealand women's movement that meant there were no strong mobilising structures, and less focus on gender equity issues in the political sphere.

The third phase, from 1999-present, saw the introduction of 12 weeks' paid parental leave with the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Amendment Act' 2002 (PPLA). However, gender equity was still

absent as a driving force for this development: arguably the PPLA was primarily driven by the interests of business, rather than the interests of women, and the legislation was chiefly justified in terms of supporting 'traditional' families. The recent defeat in February 2015 of a Private Member's Bill to extend paid leave to six months helped to further illuminate the central debates in New Zealand today around paid parental leave; notably, the central justification by the policymakers currently advocating for extending paid parental leave is child welfare. The contribution that paid parental leave has on achieving gender equity is not given high priority by policymakers.

As well as considering the social and political context behind the enactment of New Zealand parental leave legislation, this chapter also considers how the typologies of Esping-Andersen and Baird discussed in the previous chapter apply in the New Zealand context. There is considerable evidence that successive New Zealand governments have taken a predominantly conservative approach to welfare, including parental leave. Using Baird's typology, the welfare orientation has had a significant influence in New Zealand debates, although the business orientation is also evident, albeit to a lesser degree. Esping-Andersen's idea of the liberal welfare state and the conservatist/corporatist welfare state are also in evidence, and help to explain the slow development of parental leave legislation in New Zealand. As highlighted, mothers of young infants are not recognised as 'deserving' beneficiaries by policymakers, particularly if they have an employed partner, and parental leave benefits are closely tied to their position in the labour market. Consequently, paid parental leave has also had a limited impact on gender equity.

Figure 3.1 Key developments in New Zealand parental leave legislation

Year	Government	Legislation	Key features
1980	Third National Government	Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act (MLEPA)	First New Zealand parental leave legislation Gave women 26 weeks of unpaid maternity leave plus job protection for qualifying employees
1987	Fourth Labour Government	Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act (PLEPA)	Period of unpaid leave and job protection extended to 12 months Fathers entitled to share leave with mothers
2002	Fifth Labour Government	Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Amendment Act 2002 (PPLA)	12 weeks of paid leave introduced
2012	Fifth National Government	Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill	Bill was eventually defeated in Parliament Would have extended period of payments to 6 months
2015	Fifth National government	Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave and Work Contact Hours) Amendment Bill	Bill extends period of payments to 6 months and allows up to 156 'work contact hours' during parental leave

Note: this table is an expanded and updated version of that found in a report by the New Zealand Families Commission (2007, p. 18).

2. Early Developments: 1980-1990

2.1 The 'Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act' 1980

The first piece of parental leave legislation in New Zealand, the 'Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act' 1980 (MLEPA), was enacted in 1980 by the National government. The MLEPA provided 26 weeks of unpaid maternity leave plus job protection for women who had worked for the same employer for at least 18 months, and for at least 15 hours a week (New Zealand Families

Commission, 2007, p. 18). On the face of it, this legislation represented a significant step forward for women's rights, as well as recognition of the increasing numbers of women in the workforce. However, this view is overly simplistic and ignores the policy-making context at the time. The following arguments demonstrate that the developments can perhaps best be understood as a limited response to the growing influence of the New Zealand women's movement by a conservative government that framed welfare in terms of the 'deserving beneficiary'. As such, the resulting policy can be seen as subscribing to Esping-Andersen's conception of the liberal welfare state (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012).

2.2 The New Zealand women's movement in the 1970s

The New Zealand feminist movement gained particular momentum and consensus in the 1970s. This movement was part of a global 'second wave' of feminism (after the 'first wave' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) (Dann, 1985, p. 4), which was in turn rooted in the global protest movements of the late 1960s (Coney, 1993a, p. 142). Women's liberation groups of the second wave emerged throughout the country from the early 1970s onwards, and debate focused on issues such as equal pay, abortion and contraception, and access to childcare (Carlyon & Morrow, 2013, p. 212; Dann, 1985, p. 5; Macdonald, 1993b, p. 161; Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 200). The growing influence of the women's movement led to some institutional recognition: in 1972 the Labour government set up a select committee on women's rights, and in 1975 the consultative Committee on Women was established, intended to act as a link between government and women's groups (Carlyon & Morrow, 2013, p. 221). However, many feminists regarded these developments as mere 'window dressing' that would not lead to substantive change (Dann, 1985, p. 42), and some of the more radical women's groups were deeply sceptical of Parliamentary politics as an instrument for change (Macdonald, 1993b, p. 163).

Nevertheless, these developments appear to have created a more favourable political opportunity structure for women's interests. Several important

women-focused pieces of legislation were introduced in this decade, largely as a response to growing pressure from the women's movement. Such legislation included the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) in 1973, which provided single mothers with financial assistance, giving them the chance for independence (Dann, 1985, p. 40); the Equal Pay Act (1972), which outlawed gender-based pay discrimination in the private sector; the Human Rights Commission Act (1977), which outlawed all gender-based discrimination; and the Matrimonial Property Act (1976), which recognised non-financial contributions (such as childcare and housework) made by women to their marriages, and provided greater financial independence for women after divorce (Macdonald, 1993b, p. 164). All these Acts promoted the economic independence of women, a key aspect of women's ability to control their own lives and to make their own choices (Wilson, 1992, p. 270).

Equality of opportunity and treatment in the workplace was one of the key issues that the women's movement focused on during this period, and parental leave played an important role in achieving this goal (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 201). Adequate parental leave was an issue that was becoming more and more important due to a gradual change in women's socio-economic role in New Zealand society. Historically, New Zealand's family-centric legislation had been based upon a traditional paradigm of the nuclear family unit, with a male breadwinner and female homemaker, and government welfare to fill the earnings gap where this unit broke down (Shirley et al., 1997, p. 251). However, this traditional model of the family began to shift by the 1970s in response to changing social realities. The ability of average income earners to support a family on a single 'male breadwinner wage' was breaking down, as the economy weakened (Nolan, 2000, p. 30). Partly as a result of this economic change, women were entering the workforce in greater numbers and they were having children later, which increased the likelihood of them having established careers by the time they gave birth.

These trends created a push from the women's movement for employers and government to manage this career disruption better, to recognise issues of gender equity in the workplace and in particular, to offer women some

protection for their jobs while on maternity leave. Otherwise, women would struggle to maintain their career momentum after having children, making it harder for them to reach senior positions and therefore ensuring that managerial roles remained dominated by males (Jagose, 1994, p. 137). Demanding compensation for the time that women took out of their careers to care for children also challenged the idea that childcare and housework was not really 'work', i.e. did not count as productive labour (McKinlay, 1992).

Thus, in response to these developments, the New Zealand women's movement sought paid parental leave, to recognise and to recompense women for the time and labour spent caring for their infants, to ensure that their jobs would be protected until they returned to work, and additionally to enable fathers to take leave instead of mothers. Despite the energy and optimism of the New Zealand women's movement at the time, these proposals were considerably restricted in the MLEPA that was eventually enacted (Dann, 1985, pp. 78-79). To understand how and why the legislation ended up in its final form, the influence of the prevailing ideas about welfare and family structure in New Zealand must be considered. These ideas played a vital role in framing the policy debates, and in the final shape of the legislation.

2.3 Enacting the MLEPA against the background of the 'deserving beneficiary'

"The welfare state introduced from 1935 fostered a social democratic ideal of the harmonious classless society based on the conformist, upwardly mobile, two-parent, consumption-oriented family unit, cosseted by a benevolent government." (Kelsey, 1997, p. 20)

Historically the New Zealand welfare state was founded upon a basic assumption – and indeed reality – that the wages of the male breadwinner were sufficient to provide for his family. After the Second World War, Government family policy centred around maintaining the ideal of the nuclear family, with full employment for men the goal. If women did work outside the home, they were assumed to be doing so for 'pin money'. Married women did not receive equal payments for

sickness and unemployment benefits until 1979 (Nolan, 2000, p. 30). This policy frame is closely linked to Esping-Andersen's idea of the conservatist/corporatist welfare state; it also reflects Baird's (2004) concept of welfare-oriented parental leave, whereby women's role in society as mother and homemaker is the central consideration in policy-making, and the support of a husband/breadwinner is assumed (Baird, 2004, p. 265).

However, a gradual decline in the economy during the 1970s meant that the purchasing power of the single family wage was significantly reduced, leading more and more women to seek employment outside the home in order to supplement the family income (Shirley et al., 1997, p. 290). There was also a growing diversity of family forms as social norms changed and it became more common for women to divorce or to have children outside of marriage (Nolan, 2000, p. 267). Governments, however, were not always quick to recognise this change in family patterns. While some progress was made during the 1970s (as discussed above), it was sporadic and sometimes contradictory, as demonstrated by the policing of women receiving the DPB during the 1970s. This practice was prompted by officials concerned that the financial independence that the benefit offered might dissuade women from returning to a 'normal marital situation'; recipients were therefore investigated for any sign that they might be receiving support from a male breadwinner (Dann, 1985, p. 40).

This treatment of DPB recipients reflects a common thread in New Zealand's approach to welfare, namely that of the 'deserving beneficiary'. This is the idea that individuals must be morally 'deserving' of welfare in order to receive it – so, for example, widows are 'deserving' of being maintained by the state, while voluntarily single mothers are not. Shirley et al. have claimed that "New Zealand's approach to 'undeserving' beneficiaries has always been rather punitive" (Shirley et al., 1997, p. 215). This view helps to explain the comparatively slow development of parental leave provisions in New Zealand. In short, women were not seen as 'deserving' recipients, particularly if they had male partners who were employed. However, when the male breadwinner model began to break down – through unemployment or absence of a male

partner – the state would step in, albeit somewhat reluctantly, as reflected in the routine monitoring of DPB recipients.

New Zealand's welfare state policies in this period can be explained by Esping-Andersen's conception of the conservatist/corporatist welfare state, whereby how 'deserving' an individual is of receiving welfare is defined by their position in the labour market, and the goal of welfare provision is to uphold the structure of the nuclear family. In this paradigm, welfare is a last resort and is meant to compensate for lost earnings. Thus, women are only 'deserving' insofar as they themselves are participating in the labour market and do not have access to a male breadwinner (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 27). Given this conservative political and socio-economic background, how and why did the MLEPA come to be enacted?

Theories about how social movements are able to effect policy change, as defined and discussed in the previous chapter, shed more light on this question. A gradual change in the structure of New Zealand society and families provided a more favourable political opportunity structure for change. Although the political background at the time was conservative, there was also increasing recognition by policy-makers of the social changes occurring, and the need to intervene to maintain the status quo. For example, Nolan argues that the enactment of the DPB in 1973 was motivated both by public demand for such a benefit and a recognition by the government of changing family structures, and a desire to maintain social stability (Nolan, 2000, p. 267). Ravenswood & Kennedy also suggest that a general focus on employment-related issues by government in the 1970s provided further political opportunity (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 201).

New Zealand's second wave women's movement provided the necessary mobilising structure. Emerging at the beginning of the 1970s, the New Zealand women's movement gathered increasing momentum and energy throughout the decade, and was able to coalesce and unite around a range of issues in a way that has not been repeated subsequently (Macdonald, 1993b). Mobilising structures were also evident in the gradual institutional recognition of women's interests in government, such as the establishment of the Select Committee on women's

interests and the consultative Committee on Women during the 1970s, which worked within government to promote women's interests. This integration also meant that women's groups were able to successfully engage with political institutions, a crucial part of achieving policy change for a social movement. Women's groups also played a key role in framing, or the 'problem' that parental leave was meant to solve. With the achievement of gender equity as their key goal, these groups promoted parental leave as essential to women's participation in the paid workforce, and therefore helping to release them from the limited social roles of mother and homemaker (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 200).

2.4 Impact of the MLEPA

While the enactment of the MLEPA was overall seen as a victory by the women's movement, the inherent tension between its policy demands and the conservative welfare state could be seen in the final form of the legislation, which fell short of what many women's groups had hoped for. In particular, parental leave was provided solely to women and was not paid (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, pp. 202-203). Arguably these limitations to the MLEPA still reflected "the irrational attitude that women do not really have to work and that they do so only to supplement the family income and to provide themselves with extra money" (Wilson, 1973, p. 179). Additional criticisms of the MLEPA were noted by female members of Parliament, who feared that the maternity-oriented Act would stereotype women into the role of caregivers while ignoring the role that fathers played in bring up children (Grey, 2002, pp. 26-27).

Elements of Baird's business orientation are also evident in the final shape of the legislation. A frequent issue in the Parliamentary debates was concern over the costs to businesses of implementing parental leave: the National party's original promise of unpaid leave in its 1975 election manifesto was subject to consideration of its impact on businesses (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 201). The legislation in its final form also contained several provisions aimed at minimising the disruption to employers, such as not requiring them to hold an employee's position open if it was impractical to employ a short-term

replacement, and a requirement of 18 months service by the employee before they were eligible for leave (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, pp. 202-203).

Ravenswood and Kennedy meanwhile argue that the MLEPA can be regarded as primarily fitting into Baird's welfare orientation, whereby parental leave is justified by arguments around mother and child wellbeing, and women's traditional roles as homemakers (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 203). This orientation certainly appears to be the case for the government, as its enactment of the MLEPA was partly motivated by the changing of family forms and the desire to enable women to stay home with their children. While the equity orientation was arguably also evident in the women's movement's discourse, its ultimate influence was tempered by the conservatism of the government of the day.

In view of this compromise, Ravenswood & Kennedy suggest that the MLEPA should also be viewed rather pessimistically by feminists:

“...the underlying purpose of the Act was not the promotion or protection of women's rights in employment, but the support of child and family health. This resulted in women remaining economically dependent during maternity leave.”
(Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 203).

However, this evaluation may be overly negative. The impact of the MLEPA on gender equity in the workplace should still be recognised: for the first time women had their jobs protected while on maternity leave, which would have enabled many to maintain momentum in their careers. Possibly, the MLEPA is best viewed as the confluence between the growing New Zealand feminist movement and the dominant conservative bias in New Zealand politics, which nevertheless reluctantly acknowledged the necessity of recognising the changing social realities. While the outcome was disappointing to many feminists, and had a limited impact on gender equity (particularly for lower-income workers), the legislation provided an important building block for future developments.

2.5. 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act' 1987

Women's influence in unions and in political parties continued to grow after the enactment of the MLEPA in 1980. The Labour Party in particular experienced an increase both in the number of women party members and Members of Parliament. The Labour Party Women's Council from 1975 onwards helped to unite the party's women within the formal party structure (Curtin & Sawer, 1996, p. 153), and provided women with the opportunity for networking, friendships and support (Devere & Curtin, 2009, p. 100). In 1984, Margaret Wilson was elected as the first female Labour Party president (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 203). Grey refers to a growing 'team spirit' amongst Labour Party female Members of Parliament in the late 1980s (Grey, 2002, p. 22). As a result of the growing influence of Labour women, and the increased political institutionalisation of women's interests, the Fourth Labour Government came into office in 1984 with a portfolio of proposals supporting women's interests, including the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which further institutionalised women's interests within government (Curtin & Sawer, 1996, p. 157). In the 1984 general election campaign Labour had also promised to introduce parental leave – i.e. leave available to both parents, as opposed to the strictly maternal leave under the MLEPA – and to consider paid parental leave (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 204). Therefore, there was significant political opportunity for change.

Three years later, the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act' 1987 (PLEPA) was enacted. The period of unpaid parental leave was extended to 12 months, which could be freely shared between parents (in other words, the legislation was now gender neutral), and the minimum length of service requirements decreased to twelve months with the same employer and a minimum of fifteen hours per week (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 18). This Act was notable in that one of its goals was explicitly to go beyond maternity leave to include fathers in family responsibilities, going against the historical trend in New Zealand parental leave legislation, which previously focused on child and family welfare. A more gender equity-oriented policymaking approach is visible here. As such, it signalled a decreased

emphasis on women as the primary caregiver and an increased recognition of the importance of their productive role in the labour market. As Labour Member of Parliament Kerry Burke stated in support of the Bill:

“Traditionally it has been assumed that men do not need any time off work to meet their family responsibilities, while women have been considered unreliable employees because they have to cope with family responsibilities in addition to their paid work. However, the Bill ensures that both men and women will have equal opportunities to take leave to care for their children in their first year with the family and to continue employment careers.” (Burke, 1987; New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 18)

Ravenswood argues that this discourse means that the PLEPA should be viewed as falling into Baird’s equity orientation (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 205). However, as with the enactment of the MLEPA, there is evidence to suggest that this legislation reflects a compromise of interests. While Labour in its 1984 election manifesto had promised to consider paid parental leave, this plan was ultimately discarded as being too expensive, an evaluation due partly to the growing influence of neoliberalism that led to Labour beginning to remove the universal benefit base (Kelsey, 1997, p. 276; Roper, 2005, pp. 186-189) and thus lessening the political opportunity for paid leave. Therefore, with the government unwilling or unable to either pay women itself or require employers to shoulder the financial burden, parental leave remained unpaid (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 206). This reluctance would indicate that, within government at least, the business orientation had become more influential. The unpaid nature of the leave also ensured that the majority of leave-takers would remain women, as during the 1980s, women’s average earnings continued to lag behind those of men (Macdonald, 1993a, p. 207). Consequently, there was a financial incentive for women to take the majority (or all) of parental leave in order to minimise the overall drop in family income, and thereby limiting the new parental leave scheme’s potential impact on gender equity.

3. 1990-1999: Stagnation under neoliberalism

There were few policy developments in the area of parental leave during the 1990s, as it was not a priority of the neoliberal National government of the period (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 206). The universal welfare state was eroded, replaced by a limited welfare model that emphasised efficiency and self-reliance (Kelsey, 1997, p. 272). Employing Esping-Andersen's typology, there was a move towards a more liberal model of welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 26), characterised by a shrinking of the universal benefit base, increased emphasis on incentivising beneficiaries to work and stigmatisation of those receiving benefits (Kelsey, 1997, pp. 280-283).

Despite the significant role that women's groups had played in the 1970s and 1980s, feminism struggled to maintain its prominence in the 1990s, as women's interests suffered setbacks at the policy level. While the Ministry of Women's Affairs remained in place, the family allowance was abolished, the Employment Equity Act repealed, and childcare funding cut (Curtin & Sawer, 1996, p. 168). There were also significant cuts to the DPB: having children was framed as a 'choice', while teenage mothers were encouraged to adopt their babies out if their own parents could not support them (Kelsey, 1997, p. 282). Additionally, the 'Employment Contracts Act' 1991 abolished compulsory unionism and sought to promote individual employment contracts instead, removing one potential avenue for women to seek better pay and employment conditions (Curtin & Devere, 2006, p. 199). In this political environment, it is perhaps not surprising that no further parental leave gains were made. A private members' bill to enact paid leave was introduced in 1998 by Laila Harré of the Alliance Party, but was eventually defeated in Parliament (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 206).

Interestingly however, in 1999 the National government did enact the Taxation (Parental Tax Credit) Act 1999, which gave new parents a tax credit of \$150/week for 8 weeks after the birth of a dependent child (Haar & Spell, 2003,

p. 3). This appears to be paid parental leave in all but name. However, the name is important in this instance: by awarding a tax credit rather than a benefit it is both tying it to an individual's position in the labour market and decoupling it from any concept of recompense for the work women did in caring for children. Therefore, it is probably more accurate to regard this initiative as part of the overall pattern of family tax credits and assistance that had been in existence in varying forms since 1927 (Shirley et al., 1997, pp. 254-260) rather than true parental leave. Thus, Callister & Galtry suggest that the government did not intend it to be a form of parental leave, but rather was simply a form of financial assistance aimed at low-income families (Callister & Galtry, 2006, p. 41).

An additional factor that made it difficult for women's issues to gain any further traction during this period was a gradual fragmenting of the New Zealand women's movement from the late 1980s onwards. Sandra Coney argues that while women's groups had been able to achieve broad consensus on many issues during the 1970s, enabling effective mobilisation and action, the movement had splintered into a variety of specific and isolated groups working for specific and isolated issues by the 1990s (Coney, 1993b, p. 54). Grey suggests that there may have been a similar fragmentation of women MPs within Parliament: while in the 1980 debates over the introduction of the MLEPA all four female MPs, from both Labour and National, voted in favour of the Bill, in the 1998 debates over introducing paid leave four female MPs on the right side of the political spectrum opposed the Bill (Grey, 2002, p. 26).

Thus, during the 1990s both the political opportunities and the mobilising structure that might enable changes to be made were lacking: there was a government that was hostile to any expansion of the welfare state, and a lack of a cohesive women's group to push for change. Additionally, the dominant policy frame was that of Esping-Andersen's 'deserving beneficiary'. A 'deserving' beneficiary under the Fourth National Government became someone who spent as little time on a benefit as possible, with benefit levels deliberately lowered to create an incentive to return to productive paid work (Kelsey, 1997, p. 280).

4. Recent Developments: 1999-present

4.1 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Amendment Act' 2002

The social and political landscape had changed considerably by 2002, when the next major piece of legislation in the form of the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Amendment Act' 2002 (PPLA) was enacted. A more left-leaning Labour government had been elected in 1999, which over the course of its three terms in office enacted several family-friendly policies, including the PPLA, the Working for Families financial package, the 'Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act' 2007, and 20 hours of free childcare (Ravenswood, 2008, p. 35). There was also a strong economy with an accompanying labour shortage, creating a strong business case rationale to attract and retain women in the workforce (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, pp. 206-207), and subsequent political opportunity for change.

International pressure may also have been a contributing factor, with New Zealand, Australia and the United States being the only countries in the OECD to have no form of paid parental leave by 2001. However, it is unlikely that this factor, in and of itself, would have been sufficient to push the enactment of paid leave (Haar & Spell, 2003, p. 7), and indeed international pressure does not appear to have been a talking point in the Parliamentary debates over the introduction of the Bill (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012).

Returning to McAdam et al's (1996) framework regarding social movements and policy change, the political opportunity for change in this period was strong: the Labour government, while still a proponent of the free market (Roper, 2005, p. 224), was more family-friendly, as reflected in its policies regarding flexible working and the Working for Families financial benefits package. The strong economy created further opportunity for change. However, mobilising structures appear more limited. While several groups within New Zealand, such as the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, had been advocating for paid

parental leave for some time (Haar & Spell, 2003, p. 7), the mobilisation of groups such as women's groups and trade unions was not nearly as notable as during the 1970s.

Instead, the key driver behind the paid parental leave policy arguably came from within Parliament itself. Labour had formed a coalition with the far left Alliance party after the 1999 election. Paid parental leave had been on the Alliance Party's agenda for some time (Callister & Galtry, 2006, p. 41), and one of its MPs, Laila Harré, had introduced an unsuccessful parental leave Bill in 1998. Consequently, paid parental leave was high on the Alliance Party's list of priorities when entering the coalition with Labour (Callister & Galtry, 2006, p. 41). Raymond Miller argues that after the collapse of the National and New Zealand First coalition government in 1998, Labour had come under pressure to present a strong, stable coalition to the New Zealand public after its election victory in 1999, in order to ensure the continued viability of the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system. However, the party was not willing to shift far from the centre-left, and was in a strong enough position within the coalition to pick and choose which issues it conceded ground on to the Alliance Party (Miller, 2002). Therefore, Labour's enactment of the Alliance-driven paid parental leave policy fits McAdam's model neatly: the Alliance party acted as the mobilising structure, with the coalition agreement providing additional political opportunity for change.

How the policy was framed, however, and what policymakers saw as the 'problem' to be solved by enacting paid parental leave, is not so clear. One possibility is that the introduction of paid leave was aimed at encouraging more women into the paid labour market. Ravenswood notes that two other major pieces of family-friendly policy enacted by the Labour government – Working for Families and twenty hours of free childcare – were chiefly intended to encourage parents into paid productive work, rather than enabling families to have greater freedom of choice whether or not to enter the labour market (Ravenswood, 2008, p. 39). As part of this pattern of 'family-friendliness,' the PPLA may therefore be seen as consistent with Baird's business orientation.

A recurrent theme in policymaker's debates of the time was that it was primarily the responsibility of the individual to manage their work-life balance, and the role of the government was only to facilitate this process. In other words, the proper role of government was to provide more opportunities for employees to achieve a better work-life balance, without prescribing or mandating specific changes. For example, the 'Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act' 2007 gave employees the right to request changes to their working hours. However, while employers were obliged to give due consideration to such requests, they could also decline requests on justified business or operational grounds (Ravenswood, 2008, p. 38). Applying this 'laissez-faire' policy approach to parental leave, it was unlikely that wholly prescriptive policies, such as paternity-specific leave, would be enacted.

The final outcome of the legislation also reinforces the framing of paid parental leave as aimed at encouraging women into paid work. Ravenswood notes that the parental leave weekly payment of \$407.36 was less than the full time minimum wage of \$480. If the minimum wage is seen as representing the minimum an individual needs for an acceptable standard of living, then the parental leave payments were not intended to be income replacement, but a supplement to another income (usually that of a male partner), a stopgap until the mother returns to work (Ravenswood, 2008, p. 41). Again, this is a facilitative, rather than an activist, step: it gives parents more options, but it is still up to them to figure out the best way to manage the drop in income during this time. Consequently, Esping-Andersen's liberal welfare state still appears to be the best descriptor of New Zealand parental leave. Though parental leave has gradually become more generous, it is still only a stop-gap measure; it is not a true income replacement, but only minimal assistance. It would be next to impossible for a family to live on these payments alone (i.e. without another earner in the family or further government assistance).

Another policy frame used to justify the introduction of paid parental leave in New Zealand is that of child welfare. There was an increased focus on child welfare and child poverty in New Zealand both in the media and in government policy during this period, an issue which was – in name, at least – one of the

driving factors behind the Working for Families scheme (Perry, 2004). Child poverty increased rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, while New Zealand provided some of the least generous support for them in the OECD (Fletcher & Dwyer, 2008, p. 4). With growing attention to this issue in the media coinciding with a strong economy that could afford greater welfare expenditure, a platform of family-friendly policies resulted (as discussed above). This emphasis also resulted in the publication of the *Agenda for Children* by the Ministry of Social Development, a report outlining key action areas (including child poverty, violence and bullying, and 'promoting a whole child approach') to improve the lives of New Zealand children (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Child welfare was also a prominent factor in the Parliamentary debates over the introduction of the PPLA, emphasising the importance of giving mothers enough time to bond with their babies and establish breastfeeding patterns (Ravenswood & Kennedy, 2012, p. 209). However, a cynical assessment of this emphasis might suggest that child welfare was chiefly relied upon in the debates for its strong emotive impact, rather than as a true motivating factor for the legislation.

While the introduction of the PPLA was undoubtedly a significant step forward for families, and the payments would have helped to ease the financial burden a new baby placed on them, the minimalist nature of the payments and their short duration of 12 weeks indicated that women's productive labour was still valued over their reproductive labour. The fact that parental leave payments were below the minimum wage indicated that it was seen as a supplement, not a replacement, for waged income, and arguably still assumed the support of a male breadwinner in similar fashion to the original parental legislation, the MLEPA.

Where did this leave gender equity? Overall, gender equity does not appear to have been a significant driving force behind the enactment of the PPLA, as compared to the previous incarnations of unpaid leave. There was still a presumption that women would take the majority of parental leave: for biological parents, the employment eligibility requirements are based on the work patterns of the mother. However, it should be noted that for adoptive

parents, the work requirements are gender neutral – partners can choose which parent has their work patterns assessed for the eligibility requirements. This suggests that the gender-based eligibility requirements for biological parents are chiefly based on factors such as the need for mothers to recover from childbirth and establish breastfeeding (Callister & Galtry, 2006, p. 41). But it is difficult to see why a gender-neutral approach would not also work for biological parents, particularly in the circumstance where a mother may be ineligible for paid parental leave based on her work patterns, but her partner would be eligible. As discussed previously, it is vitally important that mothers have sufficient leave from paid work to recover from childbirth. But it is difficult to envision a circumstance where allowing couples to have partners and fathers work-tested instead would prevent this from happening, as long as the leave is still able to be freely transferred.

4.2 Current requirements

The ‘Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act’ 1987 sets out the current parameters for New Zealand parental leave (the length of paid leave has been extended several times since its introduction in 2002). To be eligible for payments, a mother (whether adoptive or natural) must have participated in paid employment (or been self employed) for at least six months prior to giving birth or receiving custody of a child, for an average of at least ten hours a week. She will then receive 18 weeks of paid leave. Additional unpaid leave for a total leave period of 1 year is available if the individual has worked for the same employer for six months, for ten hours or more a week. Spouses or partners are entitled to 2 weeks’ unpaid leave, subject to the same employment requirements. The period of leave - both paid and unpaid – may be shared between the two partners, up to a total of 52 weeks leave between them. Payments are a maximum of \$517 per week before tax as of 1 July 2015 (New Zealand National Party, 2015) or 100% of pay, whichever is the lesser. This is still well below the OECD median, where New Zealand ranks at 35th out of 42 countries surveyed (OECD Family Database, 2015, p. 4).

4.3 What is the impact of the current legislation?

A comprehensive survey of parents was undertaken by the Department of Labour starting in 2005, 3 years after the introduction of paid leave (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007). This survey was aimed at understanding how the legislation was working in practice, how parents were using it, and how well it was meeting its objectives. These objectives were described by the Department of Labour as: gender equity in the labour market; gender equity within families; improved health outcomes for mother and child; and greater income stability for families (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 8). The survey examined issues such as the attitudes of parents towards parental leave, how much leave they were taking versus how much they would ideally take, their experiences in returning to work, and employers' experiences of parental leave.

The survey found that there was unsurprisingly widespread support for paid parental leave amongst parents. Eight out of ten mothers who were eligible for paid parental leave were taking at least some leave (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 4). On average, women took the full entitlement of paid leave (12 weeks at the time of survey) and an additional six months of unpaid leave, often in addition to annual or other leave (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 31). Parents' major objections to the scheme were centred around financial realities: the limited amount of paid leave meant that many women returned to work sooner than they would have preferred, and while the payments helped, taking parental leave still meant a significant drop in income for many families. The weekly payments, which started at \$407.36 and have now increased to \$504.10 before tax, have always been less than the full time minimum wage. With women who go on parental leave having a median monthly income of \$3140 in the 7-12 months prior (Crichton, 2008, p. 10) it is clear that a substantial proportion of new parents experience a drop in income. It also means that there is still an incentive for women to take leave over men due to the persistence of the gender pay gap – at the end of the June 2015 quarter men had average hourly earnings of 11.8% more than women (Statistics New Zealand, 2015a, p. 5). When women did return to work, two thirds of them

changed their work patterns in some way from prior to going on leave (for example, working fewer hours, working flexible hours, or working from home).

Partners, however, were rarely taking their entitlement to two weeks of unpaid leave under the Act. Instead, they were far more likely to use annual leave around the time of the birth of the child, rather than unpaid partners' leave, often saving up their leave in order to do so. Whilst the Department of Labour survey suggests that this strategy is intended by families to prevent a further drop in family income, it also acts to reinforce males' position as breadwinners (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 40). Mothers were also reluctant to transfer their leave to their partners, with 72% saying they would not consider doing so. The primary reasons for this reticence were that they felt it was more important for mothers to bond with children, to establish breastfeeding and to recover physically from childbirth (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 39). However, it should be noted that 51% of fathers said they would be interested in taking additional leave transferred from their partners (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 43). Most fathers also changed their work patterns in some way: however, only 21% worked fewer hours after the birth of their child (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 46), as opposed to 69% of mothers who received paid parental leave (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 38). Instead, men were more likely to work flexible hours, to work from home, or to work more hours, suggesting that men may have felt a greater personal responsibility to provide for their family after the birth of a child (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 45). These patterns suggest that it is still women who are more likely to undertake the majority of childcare, and to alter their paid employment patterns in order to do so.

This study, while comprehensive, was not exhaustive for the purposes of this thesis. Firstly, it was undertaken in a different economic climate from the present day. Since then, the labour market has become more restrictive, with a higher unemployment rate: in 2007 unemployment was 3.7%, rising to 6.9% in 2012 before falling to 5.8% in March 2015 (Statistics New Zealand, 2014b, 2015b). This higher unemployment rate may mean that women are going

back to work sooner and have less flexibility to alter their working hours than was previously the case. On the other hand, the opposite could be the case: employers and employees have both had several more years to come to grips with the Act, and potentially this may result in a greater uptake of leave by both partners. Finally, there was little emphasis in the 2007 survey on how paid parental leave might impact on gender equity. The implications for gender equity in the workplace and in the home were unclear, although it was suggested that the biologically-oriented nature of paid parental leave would tend to categorise mothers as the primary caregivers of their children. Thus, the report suggested that even if paid leave was available to fathers there may be little take-up, due to societal attitudes whereby the mother's role in caring for infants is seen as more important than fathers', and/or the financial impact of fathers taking leave is perceived as too high (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 80). Again, it should be noted that this assumption may have changed in the subsequent years since this survey.

Nevertheless, several conclusions can be drawn from these survey findings. It initially appears that gender-based patterns of leave taking did not change greatly with the advent of paid leave. Mothers still take the bulk of leave, while their partners take only a few weeks (usually of annual leave) to 'help out' and then return to the role of principal breadwinner. While parental leave payments are undoubtedly a financial help, most families are still worse off for the period that a mother is on parental leave. It should also be noted that New Zealand has had gender neutral parental leave legislation since 1987 (with the PLEPA enabling parents to share leave equally between them) yet this appears to have done little to combat the perception that mothers are more important when it comes to caring for children.

A survey of the work patterns of individuals after taking parental leave was carried out by Statistics New Zealand in 2008 (Crichton, 2008). It found that 40% of parental leave recipients returned to work within six months, and 70% within 13-18 months (the maximum length of parental leave is 12 months, so this category may include parents who had other extended leave arrangements with their employers, or who started new jobs). 43% of returnees earned a

similar or higher income to before they went on leave, although drops in income were less substantial for those who had earned a higher income on average before going on leave. The majority of recipients had changed their working arrangements in some way, either by working different hours or working for a different employer. Gender was not specifically analysed in the study, beyond noting that over 99% of participants were female (Crichton, 2008). This study was chiefly descriptive and did not offer interpretations of these results; however, it does clearly demonstrate that having children, even with paid parental leave, results in a drop in income for most women, which may or may not be temporary. It is unclear how much of these changes in work patterns are due to choice: whether women are freely choosing to change their work patterns in order to care for children, or if they are forced to accept sub-optimal working conditions when returning to work.

The New Zealand Families' Commission,³ a research and advisory body set up by the New Zealand government to monitor and advise on social programmes and policies relating to families, issued extensive recommendations for the future shaping of parental leave in New Zealand in 2007 (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007). In particular, it concluded that the current scheme did not provide adequate support for families, and recommended extensive reforms. These proposals included a gradual increase to twelve months of paid leave, introduction of non-transferable partner leave, and an increase of the payment level to 80% of the average weekly full-time wage (with some alterations) (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 73). Apart from a gradual extension of the payment period, the Government has not yet taken up these recommendations.

Overall, while the introduction of paid parental leave has certainly helped families financially, it still has limitations. Specifically, women still appear to be shouldering the majority of the burden of parenthood – they are more likely to reduce their hours in paid employment in order to care for children, and due to the limited nature of the paid leave scheme that makes it difficult to justify

³ Since 1st December 2014 this organisation has been renamed the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (SUPERU).

transferring leave over to a partner, women are still taking the majority of parental leave. Thus, it appears likely that men and women are balancing work and family in different ways in New Zealand, which has a corresponding impact on their position in the labour market. I now turn to consider the future of paid parental leave in New Zealand, and the driving forces and themes behind current proposals.

5. Current debate themes

Paid parental leave remains a salient political issue in New Zealand. A Private Member's Bill, the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill', which proposed to extend paid leave to 26 weeks, was defeated in Parliament in February 2015. However, the Bill was redrawn from the ballot in September 2015 (with some alterations) (Watkins, 2015) and at the time of writing is under consideration by Select Committee.

Consequently, there is currently a great deal of debate over paid parental leave. When these debates are examined, three central themes emerge, which fit well into Baird's typology. The first is the justification of paid parental leave on the grounds of the wellbeing of children, reflecting the welfare orientation; the second is how to shape paid parental leave to fit in with the needs of business, reflecting the business orientation; the third is the impact of paid parental leave on gender equity, reflecting the latent equity orientation. This analysis is valuable because, as established in the previous chapter, the orientation that policymakers have towards parental leave, and how it is framed, has a significant impact on the final shape of parental leave policy. The dominance of the welfare orientation in the New Zealand debate in particular is notable, and sheds light on the impact that paid parental leave has on gender equity in New Zealand, and why.

5.1 The child welfare argument

Child welfare is clearly evident in the Labour Party's current campaign, beginning in 2012, to extend paid parental leave – this theme is the dominant policy frame for the party. Throughout the campaign, the Bill's supporting MP Sue Moroney has emphasised the long-term benefits to society of investing in young children (Moroney, 2012,2015). Moroney was the introducer of the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill' and justified it in the following terms:

"If Mr Smith would like to listen, I am talking about a vision ... We will not get there unless we are prepared to put children at the heart of our policy making, unless we decide to prioritise investment in those early years..." (Moroney, 2012)

This theme was continued in the introduction of the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave and Work Contact Hours) Amendment Bill' in 2015:

"It is the strongly held belief and strongly held view of the New Zealand Labour Party that early investment and intervention is a much better option than having to spend more taxpayer money on the bad outcomes of getting it wrong. We do prefer to spend a bit of money supporting bonding between parent and baby during those important 6 months of brain development than to spend ever-increasing amounts on remedial education, unemployment benefits, mental health services, and even prisons." (Moroney, 2015)

Child welfare has been a political 'hot topic' for several years, with an increased focus in the media on the growing number of children living in poverty in New Zealand (Edwards, 2014). The role of paid parental leave in alleviating poverty has been particularly highlighted by a report published by the Child Poverty Action Group, which claims that paid parental leave in its current form has a very limited impact when it comes to child poverty. This is chiefly due to the

workplace participation requirements in the PPLA, which mean that families on lower incomes and more precarious employment, who would benefit most from paid parental leave, are the most likely to miss out. To remedy this, the group advocated a universal payment for the parents of all babies up to one year old, to replace the existing paid parental leave system and tax credits (St John, 2014).

Various other organisations have also spoken in favour of the child welfare argument – the mobilizing structures behind child health advocacy in particular are significant. The '26 for Babies' organisation, founded in tandem with the introduction of the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill', is a coalition of a variety of organisations, including Plunket, the National Council of Women, Family First and La Leche League New Zealand (26 for Babies, 2012a). It identified the main benefits of extended paid parental leave as mother, child and family health, financial support for families, and job protection and enablement for women (26 for Babies, 2012b). However, as its name demonstrates, its main focus is child and family welfare, not gender equity. The New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) also supported the Bill, noting the following as justification in their submission: educational benefits; improved health outcomes for mother and child; and the wider societal benefits (giving children the opportunity to form strong and secure bonds with their parents leads to greater child wellbeing and consequently better outcomes for them in society) (New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association, 2012).

It could be argued that there is an emotive appeal at work here, particularly in the Parliamentary debates. In particular, the emphasis placed on children and babies' welfare could be construed as an attempt to gain more sympathy for the cause than appeals to gender equity would elicit. Overall, this appears to be a strongly welfare-oriented approach to parental leave (Baird, 2004, p. 265). While the current New Zealand debate does not exactly fit the welfare orientation outlined by Baird, it could be argued that it is simply a further developed form: one whereby the health of the child is prioritised above all else. While there is little emphasis on the 'cult of domesticity' that Baird discussed (Baird, 2004, p. 265) in the modern New Zealand debates, there is also little

discussion about how paid parental leave might promote gender equity. Again, while Esping-Andersen's conservatist welfare state does not entirely fit this debate, it does have relevance, particularly where the long-term policy implications are concerned.

Framing the parental leave debate exclusively in terms of child welfare has implications for how it might impact (or not) on gender equity. While the length of payments and their amount might be increased, it is unlikely that paid paternity leave would be introduced: mothers' roles are seen as paramount, particularly with regards to breastfeeding. The only reason this change might occur is if there was strong evidence as to the benefits of having two closely involved parents in the first months of a child's life. (It should be noted that there is some evidence of such benefits (del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013) and further research may be done in the future.) Further, as suggested by Esping-Andersen, the emphasis on parental care as the ideal may mean a lack of investment in other forms of childcare (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 27). This is an extreme scenario and there is no evidence that the Labour party intends for this to happen: in the most recent form of the Bill there is provision for individuals on parental leave to work for up to 156 hours over a twelve month period of leave without losing any parental leave entitlements, demonstrating an intention to help individuals re-integrate back into the workforce (Moroney, 2015). Labour also includes access to childcare in its current policy platform (New Zealand Labour Party, 2016, p. 24). But the narrowing of the debate in this way is still questionable.

5.2 The business argument

The National Government, in opposition to Labour's campaign for extended paid parental leave, has framed the issue in terms of both financial constraints – i.e. Government's inability to afford the extra parental leave payments – and as a workplace issue – greater flexibility in the workplace is needed to help parents, not extended leave. In the debates over the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill', Jo Goodhew of the National Party, then the Minister of Women's Affairs, spoke in opposition to the

Bill, stating that more parental leave was not the most effective way to encourage women back into the workforce:

“It is not just about the money, actually. It is about feeling valued in the workforce. So when the employer goes out of their way to make that person feel supported, there is much more chance—irrespective of how much paid parental leave there is—that they will return to the workforce.” (Goodhew, 2012)

In response to the introduction of the ‘Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months’ Paid Leave) Amendment Bill’, and the fact that parental leave was a current political issue that needed to be addressed in some form, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment issued a discussion paper entitled ‘Modernising Parental Leave’ in 2014. This paper outlined the National government’s priorities regarding parental leave (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014). The most important issues, as outlined by the paper, are to do with access and flexibility. The document argues that the changing nature of work in New Zealand has led to a greater diversity in working arrangements, including more casual and part-time workers, while at the same time families are more likely to have two working parents. There is also now a greater diversity of family forms (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014, p. 8).

The paper therefore proposed that the focus should be on extending parental leave to cover more ‘irregular’ workers, changing the eligibility requirements to allow women to combine hours worked for multiple employers in order to receive payments, though still requiring that women must have worked a minimum of ten hours a week for the previous six months (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014, p. 10). However, under this proposal women’s jobs would not be protected until they had worked for the same employer for six months, or if they worked for two employers, they could have both jobs protected if they had worked there for two years (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014, p. 11). There would also be ‘keeping in touch’ provisions, whereby women would be able to come into work during their

parental leave without losing payments, for the purposes of training and staying up to date with the job – the paper proposed a maximum of five days for the period of 18 weeks paid leave (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014, p. 15). Lastly, employees would be able to use their extended leave on a more flexible basis: for example, returning to work for a period of time then taking an additional period of leave, or using their extended leave to work on a part-time basis (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014, p. 16). Significantly, there was no mention in the proposals of increasing payment amounts, or extending paid leave to partners. There was a provision to extend unpaid leave to more informal caring arrangements, for example whangai adoptions, however the intention was still that paid leave should still be available only for the ‘primary carer’ (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014, p. 12). Several of these propositions have been enacted with effect 1 April 2016 (see section 4.2 above).

This approach echoes Goodhew’s statement that paid parental leave “is about flexibility and staging re-entry to the workforce,” (Goodhew, 2012) and provides a clear indicator of the current National government’s priorities with regard to parental leave. The extension of parental leave to casual and seasonal workers was positive, however the employment requirements are still framed in the terms of the ‘deserving beneficiary’ – in other words, women will be compensated only to the extent that they are productive in the labour market.

The proposals also reflect a desire to protect business interests. The changes, while emphasising flexibility, also had as a goal that businesses would be as little inconvenienced as possible. For example, while women who work more casually now have access to parental leave payments, they do not have their jobs protected if they have not worked for the same employer for at least six months. The explicit intention of this restriction is to minimise the disruption caused by a new employee taking parental leave, and encourage employee attachment to a workplace (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014, p. 11). Enabling women to come in for ‘keeping in touch’ days would also benefit business by reducing the amount of retraining needed and enabling a quicker return to pre-parental leave productivity levels for the employee. However, how

exactly these 'keeping in touch' days will be implemented is untested. The legislation specifies that working while on parental leave must be mutually agreed between the employee and employer, and cannot occur in the first 28 days after childbirth; there is also a limit of 40 hours of work over the entire parental leave period ('Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act,' 1987, s 71CE). It is untested at this point how frequently these 'keeping in touch' hours will be used. There is a risk that women who choose not to work during their parental leave could be perceived as 'less committed' to their jobs, which could impact on their careers once they do return to work.

The argument put forward by the National government against extending paid parental leave fits well with Baird's business orientation, as they are justified by finances and by what would benefit business. The argument presented is that extending paid parental leave is unaffordable at the current time, and what is needed instead is greater support for women to integrate back into the workforce (Goodhew, 2012; Hudson, 2015). This view was backed up by BusinessNZ, New Zealand's largest business advocacy organisation. It made a submission opposing the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave) Amendment Bill', noting its chief concerns as follows: the financial cost to taxpayers; the increased disengagement from the workforce that can occur when women take longer periods of parental leave; the cost to businesses; and the likelihood of employment discrimination against women of childbearing age (BusinessNZ, 2012). Ironically, it is one of the few groups that explicitly noted gender equity concerns.

One long-term implication of this business-oriented argument is that it is unlikely that paid parental leave would be extended to those without a formal connection to the labour market. While the National government has extended paid leave to some non-permanent employees, which is promising in that paid leave is now available to many lower-income women who would previously have been ineligible, paid parental leave is still firmly tied to the individual's position in the labour market, and couched in terms of the 'deserving worker'. It also appears unlikely that payments amounts will increase (apart from inflationary adjustments), in order to ensure that there is still an incentive to return to work

as soon as possible, and to emphasise the point that parental leave is not equivalent to productive labour.

5.3 The equity argument

Despite the importance of gender equity in the earliest parental leave legislation in New Zealand, the gender equity argument has not been prominent in the New Zealand paid parental leave debate in recent years. In the 2012 Parliamentary debates gender was chiefly discussed by Denise Roche of the Green Party, who spoke in support of the Bill:

“Twenty-six weeks’ paid parental leave eases a family’s immediate financial stress. Research has also shown that generous paid parental leave results in more women returning to the same job they left, which pays off for employers, who have invested in those workers. It also means working mothers are able to maintain their ability to provide for their families.” (Roche, 2012)

In the 2015 debates over the ‘Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months’ Paid Leave and Work Contact Hours) Amendment Bill’, Tracey Martin of the New Zealand First party was the only Member of Parliament to discuss issues of gender equity, specifically the possibility of paternity leave:

“I worry about the constant, perhaps, over-accentuation of mothers, with regard to this bill. I have some massive concerns about the fact that fathers seem to be left out of the dialogue, and I would really love for this bill to go to the select committee and to have an opportunity to talk about how we can better support fathers to be able to participate in the early years and the early months of their babies’ lives—their children’s lives. I truly, truly believe that when we get equality in the home we will finally get equality in the workplace. When men feel that they are 100 percent equal to women in the raising of their children and that they are not stigmatised in any way, shape, or form by taking parental leave to stay at home, then, actually, women will be advanced inside the workplace.” (Martin, 2015)

There have been other acknowledgements of the role that parental leave plays in achieving gender equity in the workplace and the home at an institutional level. The National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (NACEW), an advisory body to the Minister for Women, also published a report on parental leave in 2008. Its main recommendations were to widen the eligibility criteria, to introduce 'ring-fenced' leave for fathers, to lengthen the payment period, to introduce 'keeping in touch' provisions to enable parents to keep in contact with their workplaces while on leave, and to make leave more flexible; for example, by enabling women to simultaneously work part time and take leave part time (NACEW, 2008).

One of the most notable reports on parental leave in New Zealand, the Department of Labour (2007) report, addressed the questions "Does parental leave support gender equity in the labour market?" and "Does parental leave support gender equity in the home?" (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, pp. 60-61) as part of their wide-ranging survey on the scheme. The Families Commission (2007) report also identified gender equity in the home and the labour market as one of the three key objectives of parental leave (the others being maternal and child health and development, and family income security) (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, pp. 27-42).

Overall, however, gender equity has not been a dominant theme in the recent New Zealand debates over paid parental leave – whether in response to Labour's campaign for six months' leave, or more generally. Indeed, there is one conclusion that stretches across all the debates, including the current legislation, proposed changes and what extra-Parliamentary groups are advocating: a presumption that women should be responsible for the majority of childcare. There are no serious proposals to introduce paid leave for fathers, and there is little consideration of the impact of childcare responsibilities on gender equity in the workplace.

Why is this the case? McAdam et al's (1996) theory sheds some light: while there is some evidence of mobilising structures in the form of groups such as NACEW that promote paid parental leave on the grounds of gender equity, this is far less significant than the women's groups of the 1970s and 1980s, for

example. Additionally, there is little political opportunity for change. Calls for extending parental leave on equity grounds in Parliament have come from Members of Parliament outside the current government, and hence have had little impact on government policy. While the National government has shown some recognition of the need to address issues of gender equity in the workplace through more flexible working arrangements (Goodhew, 2012; Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014), an extension to paid parental leave is not regarded as the best way to bring about these goals. Gender equity is not one of the 'problems' that policymakers regard parental leave as being able to solve: instead, the 'problem' to be resolved is an inflexible workforce.

5. How successful has New Zealand parental leave legislation been in addressing problems of gender equity in the workplace?

Gender equity was a significant contributing factor to the early New Zealand parental leave debates in the 1970s, which arose largely from the demands of the women's movement. However as the significance of the New Zealand women's movement has decreased, so too has the stress placed on gender equity in parental leave debates.

Hence, the New Zealand debate on parental leave from 1990 onwards tended to be framed as a conflict between the interests of business and the interests of children and families. There is a thread of gender-related argument: for example, the National government's intention to provide better support for mothers to re-enter the workforce (Goodhew, 2012; Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2014; New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, pp. 27-42) would likely help women to continue their careers after having children. The NACEW, as an organisation founded to promote the rights of women, has also focused more on gender equity in its suggested changes to the scheme. However, the dominant policy paradigm in recent years has centred upon the additional benefits of extra parental leave for children's welfare, rather than

parents (Moroney, 2012,2015; St John, 2014). Parental leave is perceived as an integral part of a wider social policy framework designed to support families.

Consequently, it is disappointing but perhaps not surprising that New Zealand's parental leave policy appears to have had little impact on gender equity within the workplace, when measured in terms of providing equity of work opportunities or outcomes. The 2007 Department of Labour report itself concludes that the introduction of paid parental leave has had little or no effect on gender-based patterns of caring for children (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007). This is perhaps not surprising given the gender-targeted nature of the legislation. Paid leave is specifically assigned to "female employees" ('Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act,' 1987, s 7), while the 'spouse or partner of a pregnant woman' is entitled to partner's/paternity leave ('Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act,' 1987, s 17). The Act does allow the transfer of paid leave between spouses ('Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act,' 1987, s 71E), so in theory it is still operating on a gender neutral basis. However, in reality legislation does not function in a social vacuum. The paid parental leave scheme has been introduced in a social reality whereby New Zealand women are primarily responsible for childcare, and the legislation has not sought to alter this reality. Other family-focused legislation that has been introduced in recent years operates in a similar fashion. For example, the 'Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act' 2007, because it operates on a gender-neutral basis, fails to recognise that women undertake the majority of unpaid caregiving and therefore face different challenges to men when it comes to balancing childcare and participation in paid employment (Masselot, 2013, p. 8).

However, it is possible that paid parental leave is having an impact on gender equity beyond what the current shape of the legislation would seem to suggest. It should be noted that there is no recent data on parental leave in New Zealand (the latest extensive survey was published in 2007) (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007). While a survey of that extent is far beyond the scope of this thesis, it does suggest the possibility that patterns of leave-taking have changed in the thirteen years since the introduction of paid leave: there may be more

sharing of leave between partners, particularly since the gradual extensions of the payment period, and awareness of this feature of the legislation has also grown. A fuller picture of how paid parental leave impacts on parents once they return to work, and how they choose to balance work and caring for children, might be gained through interviewing parents about their choices.

6. Summary

McAdam et al.'s theory on the role of social movements as change agents (McAdam et al., 1996) helps to shed light on the history and development of New Zealand parental leave policies. While since the 1970s there have always been groups inside and outside of Parliament pushing for enhanced parental leave policies, their success has been dependent both on their own mobilising ability and the prevailing political opportunity structure.

The initial phase of parental leave development was characterised by a relatively strong women's movement that sought to engage with policy-making structures to achieve its goals of gender equity. This resulted both in concrete legislative achievements (including the MLEPA) and a gradual institutionalisation of women's interests in the New Zealand political machinery, such as the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. However, a gradual splintering of the women's movement in the 1990s, combined with a government that was less willing to engage with women-specific interests, meant that parental leave progress halted until the early 2000s, when a more receptive government, positive economic conditions, and a labour shortage combined to result in the enactment of paid leave. However, the structure of the legislation was still based on the assumption that women would be the primary caregivers of infants, and therefore has not had a noticeable impact on gender equity in the workplace or on gender-based patterns of childcare.

Paid parental leave is still very much a salient political issue, with debate continuing within and beyond Parliament over the appropriate period of leave

and amount of payments. There is also still little consensus as to what the goals of parental leave are or should be – whether its primary function is to minimise employers’ disruption and/or costs, to ensure that infants are properly cared for in their first months of life, or to achieve gender equity within and beyond the workplace - or a combination of these objectives.

Throughout the debates there has been a clash between the interests of business, who are primarily concerned with minimising the cost and disruption to employers that can occur when employees go on parental leave, and promoting child welfare and wellbeing – a factor that is often relied upon for additional emotive impact by proponents of extended parental leave. “The workplace has not changed to accommodate women’s role as mothers; instead women are expected to participate as if they had no children at all.” (Coney, 1993b, p. 57)

Perhaps unsurprisingly given this confusion, the impact of paid parental leave on gender equity in New Zealand has been mixed and uncertain, as Baird predicted would be the case in countries that do not subscribe to the equity model of parental leave (Baird, 2004, p. 270). The research I will undertake in my following chapters will attempt to gain an understanding of what impact paid parental leave has on the choices parents make around caring for their children, and how that impacts on gender equity in the workplace. The specific questions I plan to address are as follows:

1. How do families (including non-traditional) use paid parental leave, and how well does it advance their interests?
2. How can families use the legislation to re-integrate back into the workforce?
3. What is the lasting impact of paid parental leave on families who have used it?
4. What impact does New Zealand’s paid parental leave legislation have on gender equity?

In my next chapter I will address and justify the research methodology of semi-structured qualitative interviews that I plan to use to answer these questions.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

1. Introduction

In the previous chapters this thesis has outlined an analytical framework for discussion of paid parental leave based on Esping-Andersen and Baird's typologies of the welfare state, with reference to theories of social movements. I have then critically evaluated the development of parental leave in the particular New Zealand context within this analytical frame. I concluded by outlining the particular questions to be addressed through further research.

This chapter will clarify the research methodology to be used in answering these questions. It first outlines other approaches that have been used to studying the question of the impact of parental leave on gender equity, and then establishes the validity of qualitative research to investigate these issues further. It also addresses how I plan to select and interview participants, and addresses any ethical issues that may arise in the course of the research. Finally, I examine how I will ensure the validity of my research.

2. Literature review - how has the impact of parental leave on gender equity been studied in the past?

2.1 New Zealand studies of parental leave

The New Zealand Department of Labour published an extensive survey in 2007 that looked at the impact of paid parental leave starting three years after its introduction in 2002. It had a tripartite research design. First, an environment scan was carried out, whereby 1000 parents were phoned and asked a brief set of five questions. These participants were found via a random sampling of the New Zealand Register of Births, to find parents of children born in the relevant

time period (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 11). Next, 55 participants were selected – both parents and employers – and an in-depth interview carried out with each participant. Finally, a quantitative survey of 501 parents and 150 employers was done. This survey had a broad sweep, however it consequently did not inquire deeply into the motivations and challenges faced by parents. Mothers' experiences returning to work were addressed in a chiefly quantitative way (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007) with the survey asking women to slot their experiences into predetermined categories. There was also little analysis done of the differing impact of paid parental leave on individuals with differing incomes and occupations.

Another study aimed at detecting the initial impact of paid parental leave in New Zealand after its implementation in 2002 was that carried out by Sarah Crichton (2008), who studied the employment and earning patterns of people who received paid parental leave between 1 July 2002 & 30 June 2005 using data from Statistics New Zealand. This survey addressed questions such as whether people stayed with the same employer after returning from parental leave, whether their earnings changed, and whether they changed their hours of work. As a purely quantitative survey, it does not offer insight into *why* employment patterns change after having children. However, the very broad nature of the study, encapsulating all recipients of paid parental leave in New Zealand for the relevant time period, does provide useful data about employment trends after parental leave.

Taking a more historical focus, Katherine Ravenswood and Ann-Marie Kennedy (2012) examined the New Zealand Parliamentary debates over the introduction of parental leave from 1979 to 2002. Their study sought to categorise each debate under the typology developed by Marian Baird (2004) and therefore to determine what the motivating factors were for each major piece of legislation – welfare, bargaining, business or equity. This research took a more qualitative approach, seeking to understand the motivations and complex factors behind policymakers' actions at the time. This study is particularly relevant for analysing the development of parental leave in New Zealand from a

historical perspective, and is useful for illustrating the dominant framing processes of the time.

One of the few qualitative studies on gender-based patterns of caregiving in New Zealand was that carried out by Johanna Schmidt (2014). She examined the process behind couples' decisions as to which partner would take time off work to care for a newborn infant, using data from qualitative interviews that were originally conducted on the topic of infant feeding in 2008 – hence, the data was not originally targeted at the subject of leave-taking, and comments on that subject were largely incidental. The sample consisted of 12 couples, all of whom were heterosexual, from the Auckland region, Pakeha and earned over \$100,000, making it a relatively homogenous sample. Schmidt found that gender-based ideas of childcare responsibilities were still prevalent amongst her sample. While most couples did consider factors such as relative incomes and career trajectories when deciding who would be the primary caregiver, many couples also simply assumed that the female partner would become the primary caregiver. Schmidt concluded that the current paid parental leave scheme was not doing enough to resolve the gender imbalance that resulted from parenting (Schmidt, 2014, p. 33)

Another qualitative study was that conducted by Maureen Baker (2010), who looked at how New Zealand parents managed the work-life balance, with a focus on gender-related issues. Data from three previous studies were used – all consisted of qualitative interviews. The first study involved participants currently undergoing fertility treatments; the second study interviewed academics at New Zealand universities about their parenting choices; the third study looked at solo mothers currently on the Domestic Purposes Benefit and transitioning into paid work. Two of the three studies were undertaken before the introduction of paid parental leave in 2002. Baker concluded that the 'child penalty' affects women at both the high and low ends of the income scale; however, how parents choose to balance work and childcare can vary greatly depending on their own individual circumstances (Baker, 2010, p. 223)

2.2 Overseas

In Australia, Whitehouse, Hosking & Baird (2008) carried out an analysis of quantitative data on mothers' satisfaction with the length of their parental leave, consisting of a sample of 1223 Australian mothers. Similar to the study undertaken in New Zealand by the Department of Labour (2007), the data categorised women's reasons for returning to work when they did, and whether or not they would have taken more leave had it been available to them. At the time of the study there was no federal paid leave available in Australia, though unpaid leave of up to 52 weeks was available, subject to length of service requirements (Callister & Galtry, 2009, pp. 7-8). However, many parents did have access to employer-provided paid leave schemes. The study concluded that both women who had paid leave available to them and those who did not experienced some dissatisfaction with the length of their leave, and many reported that they would have taken longer leave if they could.

After the introduction of legislated paid parental leave in Australia in 2010, the Australian Department of Social Services conducted a review of the scheme (Australian Department of Social Services, 2014). This was primarily a broad functional review (for example, how many parents were using paid leave and the average length of leave taken), and did not conduct a deep analysis into the leave scheme.

Ekberg et al. (2013) carried out a quantitative survey on the impact of the Swedish 'daddy month' (a month of parental leave specifically set aside for fathers introduced in 1995) on gender equity and household division of labour. The study used as an indicator which parent took leave in order to care for a sick child,⁴ finding that the introduction of the 'daddy month' had not increased the likelihood of fathers taking caring leave. However, as a purely quantitative analysis, this survey did not delve into more qualitative factors that might impact which parent took leave, such as the receptiveness of different workplaces to employees taking caring leave.

⁴ Sweden provides specific leave for the care of sick children, up to 60 days a year per child.

Kotsadam & Finseraas (2011) looked at the impact of a similar policy in Norway that was first introduced in 1993, allocating fathers four weeks of non-transferable parental leave. While this project also took a quantitative approach, it used a telephone and postal survey of parents to determine whether the introduction of ring-fenced paternity leave impacted the sharing of & conflicts over household tasks. It determined that household tasks were shared more equally after the introduction of the leave, however it did not examine what the flow-on effects of this change might be – for example, if childcare was also shared more equally.

2.3 Summary

Overall, previous research on parental leave and gender equity in both New Zealand and overseas has been largely statistics-based, although some qualitative studies have also been undertaken. While this works well for answering questions such as the average length of leave taken and earnings after having children, it is less useful for examining parents' individual experiences when it comes to taking parental leave. Parents are motivated by a wide range of factors and face a variety of challenges when it comes to balancing work and caring for young children, and there is a need for a closer examination of these issues. This is best done through qualitative research.

3. Qualitative research – the value of small scale in-depth interviews

Qualitative research can be defined as research that seeks to understand social phenomena in terms of the beliefs, motivations and intentions of social actors (Davidson & Tolich, 1999, p. 25). It seeks to capture small areas in a great deal of depth, and often uses research methods such as in-depth interviews or direct observation (Tolich & Davidson, 2003, pp. 123-124). Unlike quantitative research, which tends to lend itself well to a 'broad but shallow' approach to the

gathering of information, frequently using methods such as telephone or postal surveys (Tolich & Davidson, 2003, p. 123), in-depth qualitative research allows us to understand the impacts of public policy as experienced by individuals and in their own words.

Some quantitative research has already been carried out on the topic of paid parental leave in New Zealand (Crichton, 2008; New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007) covering topics such as the average length of leave taken, whether parental leave recipients returned to full-time or part-time work, and category-based reasons for why recipients did (or did not) return to work. However, what is missing from the New Zealand literature is an in-depth qualitative analysis of the choices and decisions that parents make around parental leave, and their subjective experiences with taking leave and returning to work. While Schmidt's 2014 study did contain in-depth interviews with parents about their decision-making processes around parental leave, it was short-term in scope: couples (all first-time parents) were interviewed prior to giving birth and again three months after birth (Schmidt, 2014, p. 21), and did not consider parents' experiences re-integrating into the workforce. That the data was drawn from a study originally conducted on the topic of infant feeding is also a limiting factor, as it means that issues around parental leave may not have been focused on as closely by the interviewer.

The decisions that parents make around childcare are often complicated and emotion-laden; mothers who return to work after a period of parental leave may feel both relief and guilt, and the process of re-integrating into the workforce can be complicated and lengthy. While quantitative research has captured such information as the fact that only 43% of women return to work from parental leave to a similar or higher income (Crichton, 2008), it does not show the decision-making process that goes along with this: is the drop in income a result of a deliberate choice by women to work part-time, or to change roles, in order to spend more time with their children, or do they experience pressure from their employer to change to a less 'demanding' role on the assumption that now they have children, their priorities lie elsewhere? And what role does their partner play in the decision-making process? Such issues, with their

accompanying emotions, tensions and complexities, are best suited to be captured by qualitative research (Opie, 2003, p. 243).

4. The use of semi-structured interviews

Face-to-face interviews are a commonly used qualitative research technique. They can also be used in quantitative research, generally with an interviewer asking a pre-determined set of questions of a subject (Babbie, 2005, p. 274). However, qualitative interviews differ in that while there will generally be a list of topics to be covered in the interview, it is more free-form: the interviewer is free to pursue topics raised by the participants in a way that is not possible in a fully structured interview, resulting in greater and deeper insight (Babbie, 2005, p. 314). This is particularly valid where the interviewer is an 'outsider' to the group that the participant is a member of, as is the case with the current study as I am not a parent myself. A semi-structured interview, while ensuring that the particular research questions are addressed, offers the opportunity of "reproducing the world of the person being interviewed, not attempting to make sense of it from some predetermined perspective." (Opie, 2003, p. 240)

For the purposes of this research, a list of five main topics to be covered during the interview was formulated, with sub-topics as further points to address or prompts. Each topic was used as an introductory question. The main questions were as follows:⁵

1. What factors were important to you (and your partner) when choosing who would be the stay-at-home caregiver for the first months of your child's life? What role did gender-based assumptions around the care of children play?

⁵ A full transcript of my interview questions, including sub-questions and prompts, is contained in the appendix.

2. What were your experiences in the workplace when you returned from parental leave? How do you feel your parental status has impacted on your work?
3. What factors are important to you (and your partner) when deciding who takes on childcare responsibilities that might impact on your work? (e.g. staying home when a child is sick, taking flexible work hours to enable daycare pickup, taking time off during school holidays)
4. If paid parental leave was extended to fathers/partners, how likely would you/your partner be to take it up? Why/why not?
5. To what extent do you feel that you've been able to make the childcare and employment choices that suit you and your family best? What policy-related changes would you like to see to help you?
6. How do you feel paid parental leave has impacted on gender equity in your own life?

5. Participant and case study selection

I primarily used snowballing recruitment to obtain participants. This method, also known as 'peer referral', entails first contacting a member of the relevant group being studied who is already known to the interviewer, and then asking them to contact other members of the group (Babbie, 2005, p. 190). This form of sampling is particularly relevant where it would otherwise be difficult to identify members of the target group (Davidson & Tolich, 2003a, p. 119). My starting point was to identify two workplaces where I had existing contacts, and where a large number of women were employed (thereby increasing the range of participants I had access to). I used two methods to get in touch with participants: I approached participants directly myself, generally via email; and I also asked participants to forward my details to any colleagues they thought might be interested in participating. Generally, I interviewed any interested and

eligible participant; however there was also an aspect of deliberate sampling, whereby I contacted potential participants who I knew had a less traditional family form, in order to capture a greater diversity of experiences. I also tried to ensure I had participants from a range of different roles, such as managerial and administrative.

Although limited by the relatively small scope and resources of a masters' thesis, it was important for this project to attempt to gain participants from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and family forms. This is because parental leave does not affect all parents in the same way. While all new parents face additional financial costs regardless of their job or income situation (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 22), the structure of New Zealand paid parental leave means that the level of assistance available to parents, as well as its importance, varies. There are two main factors that determine the impact of paid parental leave on individuals: pre-birth financial situation, and employer support.

At the most basic level, individuals must be in steady employment to be eligible for paid parental leave, and if they do not work full time they may be eligible for only partial payments.⁶ Even for individuals in permanent employment who are eligible for the full amount of payments, taking time off work has a variable impact. As discussed in chapter 3, the level of the parental leave payments is set below that of the full-time minimum wage, so it is likely that a family will face a significant drop in income when taking parental leave. How well they are able to cope with this largely depends on their pre-existing financial and employment status: some families will have a greater capacity to save prior to the child's birth or adoption, pre-existing financial assets to rely on, or a high-earning partner who will continue to work, that help to ease the financial strain (New Zealand Families Commission, 2007, p. 22). Single mothers, or families with lower incomes, will find the first few months of their child's life more difficult.

⁶ I describe paid parental leave eligibility requirements in more detail in chapter 3.

Secondly, the individual's employer also makes a significant difference. While employers have a basic statutory requirement to keep an individual's job open for them while they are on parental leave,⁷ and to give due consideration to requests for flexible working conditions once the employee returns to work (Massetot, 2011, p. 78), this leaves considerable scope for further support – or lack thereof – by employers. Employers have fairly broad discretionary powers when it comes to determining flexible working arrangements (Massetot, 2011, p. 84), and an employer's overall approach to managing the work-life balance of their employees might have a considerable impact on how new parents take their leave. The 2007 Department of Labour survey showed that 12% of mothers who took paid parental leave returned to work earlier than originally planned due to their employer asking them to do so (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 34). Only 7% of mothers returned to work on the same hours, pay & conditions as before the birth of their child (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 37), indicating the importance of employer flexibility. It should also be noted that 80% of mothers said that their employer was either supportive or very supportive of their parental leave decisions (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 39), so it is important not to overstate the case for an unsupportive employer; but the structure of the current legislation leaves open the possibility that an employer could be inflexible towards working mothers.

Further to this, some employers offer additional paid leave on top of the statutory payments. While there does not appear to be any data available on how frequent this is in New Zealand, it is probably not unreasonable to speculate that additional leave is most frequently available to permanent employees of large businesses and/or to highly paid, highly skilled employees. This obviously puts employees in a better financial situation, and may expand their options – including taking longer parental leave, or transferring leave to their partner – in a way that is not available to individuals without this level of employer support.

⁷ Subject to certain requirements: see s 51, 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act' 1987

Therefore, there is considerable scope for the impact of paid parental leave to differ between individuals of different income levels and occupations. Thus, I have deliberately selected my participants in order to attempt to capture a range of different parental leave situations. While all participants took parental leave, I have attempted to capture a range of incomes and levels of employer support, in light of Robert Yin's suggestion that participant selection should be based on "the case(s) that will most likely illuminate your research questions." (Yin, 2014, p. 28) This approach is known as purposive sampling.

On a more basic level, the operational criteria by which a potential candidate is qualified to serve as a participant in my study (Yin, 2014, p. 95) is as follows:

1. Has received parental leave in New Zealand commencing three or more years ago (in other words, their eldest child for whom they took parental leave is at least three years old)
2. Has since returned to work – this can be on a part-time, full-time, casual or permanent basis, so long as they are engaged in some form of paid employment.

6. Research ethics

All research has potential ethical implications that must be considered. The University of Canterbury ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects require that all such research must:

- have the informed consent of participants
- guarantee confidentiality of data and individuals
- avoid unnecessary deception,
- minimise risk to all participants
- be consistent with Treaty of Waitangi obligations. (University of Canterbury, 2015)

Under these ethical guidelines, my research can generally be considered to be low risk: there is no risk of harm to participants, and no deceit will be used. However, the points regarding informed consent and preservation of confidentiality should be specifically addressed.

Voluntary participation is important whenever research involves personal information being revealed, particularly to an unknown researcher (Babbie, 2005, p. 62). As my study involves participants discussing their personal experiences and decision-making, it is important to ensure full and informed consent to these questions. Prior to consenting to the research, participants received an initial letter outlining my research, the commitment required from them and the types of questions I would be asking. They were also given the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time without consequences, including the full withdrawal of any information relating to them. Interviews were tape-recorded, and I ensured that the participants were aware when I switched the recorder on, and were able to ask for the recording to be stopped at any time. Participants were also given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and make any changes they wished.

Anonymity and confidentiality (specifically the latter) is another potential issue for my research. Total anonymity was impossible, as I carried out face-to-face interviews; however, I ensured confidentiality by making sure that no one other than myself was able to identify participants (Babbie, 2005, p. 65). This was particularly relevant to my research as participants' responses could include criticisms of their employers. Removing all identifying information from transcripts, and assigning pseudonyms to participants in the report of my results, helped ensure confidentiality. The list of pseudonyms corresponding to participants was password-protected and stored separately from the main data.

7. Research validity

Research validity has two dimensions. Internal validity measures how well cause-and-effect relationships have been established within the study, while external validity measures how well the findings can be extended outside the bounds of the original study. Often as internal validity increases, external validity decreases (Carlson & Hyde, 2003, p. 263).

Qualitative research such as this project often lacks external validity, due to small numbers of participants and research methods that may change throughout the project, thus making the research difficult or impossible to replicate (Davidson & Tolich, 2003b, p. 34). However, this is not necessarily a fatal flaw if the project has internal validity: that is, if it seeks to provide an accurate description of how the particular group of people being studied behave. In order to achieve internal validity, it should be possible to develop a single, consistent interpretation through analysing the available data (Davidson & Tolich, 2003b, p. 34).

This process is known as triangulation, whereby multiple sources of evidence are coalesced into the answer for a single set of research questions, developing what Robert Yin refers to as ‘converging lines of inquiry’ (Yin, 2014, pp. 119-120). If a variety of different sources of evidence are all ‘honing in’ on the same answer to a particular question, then the researcher can have greater confidence in the validity of their findings (Davidson & Tolich, 2003b, p. 34). With specific reference to this study, I have used a three-stage approach in order to answer the research question, “How and to what extent does New Zealand’s paid parental leave policy advance gender equity?” Firstly, I have used secondary sources of evidence (see in particular my second and third chapters) to examine paid parental leave from a policy-focused viewpoint, and reviewing the findings of existing studies that have addressed similar questions. Next, I have interviewed women who have received paid parental leave about their personal experiences, obtaining primary evidence. Finally, I have compared my own findings against secondary sources in order to test their validity.

Due to the small scale of my research, my aim is not to obtain findings that can be generalised to the whole population of New Zealand parents. Rather, my aim is to discover common problems, choices and motivations that are experienced

by recipients of paid parental leave, which might be used to inform policy-makers in the future.

8. Summary

In this chapter I have outlined previous approaches to research on the issue of paid parental leave and gender equity, both in New Zealand and overseas. I identified that an in-depth qualitative account of parents' experiences while on parental leave and attempting to re-integrate into the workforce was lacking from the current New Zealand literature. I discussed the applicability of qualitative research to questions of this nature, and justified my use of semi-structured interviews, as well as my approach to finding and selecting participants. Finally, I addressed questions of ethics and research validity that applied to the current project. The next chapter will contain my research findings.

Chapter Five: Case Study Results and Discussion – how do women perceive the impact of paid parental leave on their own lives?

Introduction

In my previous chapters I outlined the theoretical underpinnings of parental leave and the role that gender equity plays – or does not play – in shaping parental leave schemes. I also examined the history of parental leave in New Zealand, and looked at how the present legislation is functioning, before discussing the prevailing debates over parental leave in the political arena and how prominent gender equity is in the current New Zealand context.

I then established the need for the primary qualitative research that will be discussed in the current chapter. I examined existing research on the topic of parental leave in both New Zealand and overseas, and determined that an in-depth qualitative account of parental leave and its long-term impacts in New Zealand was lacking from the current literature. I established the validity of using qualitative research in the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews to answer my research questions, and addressed how I would ensure the validity and ethical nature of my research.

This chapter contains my research findings of in-depth interviews with seven recipients of parental leave, as well as a discussion of the implications of my findings. It addresses the decision-making processes behind parental leave, how families choose to balance work and childcare, and what impact participants feel parental leave has had on gender equity in their lives.

Participant profiles

All names used in this thesis are randomly assigned pseudonyms.

A total of seven female participants were interviewed. All worked in either the human resources or the insurance industry, industries which were selected because of ease of access for field interviews based on this researcher's own career experience and research networks, and because these employment sectors employ large numbers of women.

The women interviewed in this study occupied a range of roles, from administrative to managerial. 6 out of 7 participants were either married or had a long-term partner (all male); 4 out of 7 had spent some time as a single parent. All participants had received paid parental leave for at least one child, with the exception of Natalie, whose child was born just prior to the introduction of the scheme; however, she did receive unpaid parental leave. Interviews were conducted in a public café, except for one, which was conducted in the participant's office at her request. Most interviews were recorded and later transcribed by myself, except for one interview, where the recording equipment was faulty: in that instance I typed up notes after the interview, and sent them to the participant to confirm that she was happy that these accurately represented her responses, with an invitation to add any other information she wished.

Angela is married and has three children, aged 6, 5 and 3. She took around four months' leave with each child, and with her two younger children also received 9 weeks' paid leave from her employer, while her husband received 5 days' paid leave from his employer. She has changed jobs three times since having children, and has mostly worked full time hours; she is currently working four days a week in an advisory role.

Caroline is married and has two children, aged 7 and 6. She has worked for the same company for 10 years in various roles, and is currently in a managerial role. She took six months' parental leave with each child, while her husband received two weeks' discretionary leave from his employer. She works full time hours, but has some flexibility to allow her to drop off and pick up her children from school, and often works from home and on the weekends.

Elizabeth has a long-term partner and has two children, aged 5 and 1. She took around ten months parental leave with each child, while her partner took around a week's annual leave when each child was born. She started working for her current employer in 2007, but was made redundant whilst on parental leave with her first child. She subsequently worked for two other companies within a short space of time before returning to her original employer on a part-time flexible basis.

Gemma has a long-term partner and three children, aged 6, 3 and 9 months, and was still on parental leave at the time of interview. She took a year's parental leave with each child, while her partner received two weeks of paid leave from his employer at the births of her second and third children (she was single when her first child was born). She has worked for the same employer since before the birth of her first child, and returned from parental leave to part-time hours. She plans to continue working similar hours when she returns to work in early 2016.

Isabelle has three children, aged 17, 12 and 5, and has been with her current partner for a year; she shares custody of her children with their fathers. She took only eight weeks' parental leave when her first child was born (prior to the introduction of paid parental leave), and took around seven months with her younger two children. Her partners each took around two weeks' annual leave when their children were born. She has been with her current employer for 11 years, and currently works full time hours with flexible start & finish times.

Katie has two teenage sons with her ex-husband and a daughter with her current partner. She took around 5 years out of the workforce when her sons were born (prior to the availability of paid parental leave), and took six months' parental leave when her daughter was born. She currently works flexible hours; her partner works part-time so does much of the everyday caregiving for their daughter. She has worked for her current employer for around 10 years.

Natalie has two teenage daughters, one adopted, and is single. She gave birth to her daughter just before the introduction of the paid parental leave scheme, and consequently took only five weeks' leave from her job. She currently works

full time flexible hours in a managerial position, and has been with her current employer for over 10 years.

Figure 5.1 Participant data

Name	Age	Number of children	Took paid leave	Length of parental leave	Length & nature of partner's parental leave	Current income	Current working patterns
Angela	44	3	Yes	Around 4 months	5 day's discretionary leave	\$60,000-\$80,000	Four days/week, flexible start & finish, can work from home
Caroline	40	2	Yes	6 months	2 weeks' discretionary leave	\$80,000+	Full time, flexible start & finish, can work from home
Elizabeth	35	2	Yes	10 months	1 week annual leave + some domestic leave	\$20,000-\$40,000	Part time, flexible start & finish, can work from home
Gemma	31	3	Yes	12 months	2 weeks' annual leave	\$20,000-\$40,000	Part time
Isabelle	38	3	Yes, with younger two children	7 months	2 weeks' annual leave	\$40,000-\$60,000	Full time, flexible start & finish times
Katie	38	3	Yes, with youngest child	6 months		\$40,000-\$60,000	Part time, flexible start & finish times
Natalie	36	2	No	5 weeks' unpaid leave	N/A	\$80,000+	Full time, flexible start & finish times, can work from home

1. How do families use paid parental leave, and how well does it advance their interests?

1.1 How does the availability of paid parental leave affect planning before and during pregnancy? To what extent do prospective parents take it into account?

All participants were aware before getting pregnant that paid parental leave was available. Several participants worked in human resource roles, and therefore had a knowledge of the scheme that may be above that of the average individual. Gemma, who works in a different industry, and whose first pregnancy was unplanned, was less aware of the details of the scheme:

“Like, I knew that there was a year of maternity leave, but I didn’t know about how long you got paid, I didn’t know, you know, that they had to keep your job open or anything like that, um, I found all that out pretty quickly, um, and a lot of that was through emails and things like that. And talking to my mum. But other than that, I was living my life, I didn’t even – kids didn’t even factor into it. Yeah, never thought about it.” (Gemma)

Katie also wasn’t sure of her financial entitlements prior to going on leave, and assumed she might receive her full amount of pay – discovering that this was not the case led to a last-minute financial scramble.

Most participants expressed some level of uncertainty when discussing how well prepared they’d felt before having children. Many mentioned underestimating the financial and personal demands of having children:

“Um, well, yeah, I think I was a bit crap really! Because I’d never actually wanted kids, and, then I met my husband, it was all like ‘oh I love you, I want to have babies,’ yeah. And I think – and to start off with, [husband] and I both worked, when [first child] was born, and he reduced down to 4 days a week, and I was working four days a week here at Company Y, so, like, I would have Mondays off, he would have Fridays off, and then, you know, and we just thought, ‘oh, we’re

fabulous,' you know, 21st century parents, sharing everything, yada yada, yeah, and then financial realities sink in." (Angela)

"Definitely figure it out as it happens, yep. Um, I didn't set myself any ideas or goals or plans, it was just, take it as it comes, yep." (Isabelle)

Elizabeth in particular mentioned the difficulty in preparing for the arrival of a second child:

"Um, but trying to, trying to save enough – especially when you've already got a kid that's in preschool, and you're already working reduced hours, trying to save enough for that second lot of parental leave, it's flipping impossible. It's really tough. And we just didn't, we just got to the end, and we kind of had our head in the sand a bit, and it was like, shit, we've got no money left, I'm going to have to go back to work." (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth also discussed the way in which the availability of paid parental leave had affected the planning of her family. She had been made redundant, and then changed jobs twice within a year, which due to the length of employment requirements in the PPLA, meant that she would have been ineligible to receive paid parental leave:

"So we really wanted to try for our second baby but I kept having to put it off because of, because I knew that that fourteen weeks was too much money to not have, I wouldn't be able to do it. And it really, really annoyed me and upset me that I'm planning my family and the age gaps in my siblings was reflective of having – of that sort of red tape stuff." (Elizabeth)

1.2 How much leave is taken in total?

The length of leave taken by participants varied. Notably, the two participants (Isabelle and Natalie) who had taken parental leave prior to the introduction of the PPLA had much shorter leave periods than other participants, of 5 weeks and 8 weeks respectively. Under the PPLA, the length of leave ranged from 4 months

(for Angela) to 12 months (for Gemma). This range is indicative of the wide range of factors that parents consider when deciding how much parental leave to take – it is very much an individual decision, and hence there is a great deal of variety in the length of leave.

1.3 What kinds of factors are important to parents when deciding when to go back to work?

The most obvious factor, and one mentioned by all participants, was financial: namely, how long their family could afford to be without their income. For most participants, this was ultimately the deciding factor when deciding when to return to work:

“...we always knew that I would be going back to work, you know, after only sort of four months or so, because that was about the most we could sort of be without the income.” (Angela)

“It was all financial, yeah, it was just purely financial. We needed to have two incomes coming in, and so we’d taken a break for as long as we could, um, and, even weighing up the cost of childcare, it was still going to be better for me to be back at work.” (Caroline)

“And then I think we also found it quite hard because I had been working, gone down to part time working after having our first child so our income was lower, so it was much harder to save for that unpaid parental leave, much much harder. So we actually really struggled in that time, and I had to come back to work probably sooner than I would have liked, I came back when [second child] was nine months old.” (Elizabeth)

However, other factors were also important to participants. One was the personal desire to go back to work:

“I’m not that kind of person, you know, as much as I love my kids there’s times when it’s driven me nuts. I would have liked at most a year, but it never really, I

never felt ...what's the word, I never felt aggrieved that I had to go back at four months." (Angela)

"I kind of got to the point where, you know, we were having lots of fun, um, but also it was kind of, I needed to...I needed to do both, you know? I kind of wanted, yeah, I needed to get back into the workforce." (Caroline)

"The other thing was that I was really quite keen that I didn't want to lose my, um, my job and my role, you know, my professional qualifications and that kind of thing, I was just starting to step into my stride and I didn't want to lose that." (Caroline)

"...I would've been ready to come back to work at one year, um, anyway, um, just because I, just because I like being at work and like that extra thing in my life, um, but definitely part time." (Elizabeth)

"A year was just right for me, like, I do need, I think I do need to go back to work for, um, social purposes, it's, um, I think it's important to have time away from your kids too." (Gemma)

Katie had taken five years off from the paid workforce when her elder two children were born, but had found being a stay-at-home mum very tough, and had suffered from depression during that time. Consequently, she decided to return to work after six months when her youngest child was born, knowing that it was important for her own mental wellbeing.

Another point brought up was that it was important that leave was long enough for babies to be older and more settled:

"...having a year off, generally by the time babies are a year old they're sleeping a lot better as well, I think the first nine months is just – some babies are really good at their sleep, but the majority of babies are just like, good sleep patterns, bad sleep patterns, so you get moments where you're like 'yay, my baby's sleeping!' and then one month later they're not. So I could not imagine going back to work at 12 weeks, you know, three months, four months, five months." (Gemma)

"...I think it is important to have that first six months. I know that I, I mean I just couldn't function you know, probably even when I came back after four months, I

probably shouldn't have been back at work just from the sleep deprivation and everything.

So you reckon six months just to get into the state where the baby's more settled and you can, yeah.

Exactly, yeah. And just things are like 'oh yeah, this is cool, baby is part of the family.' (Angela)

1.4 What kind of leave do partners take? What is the decision-making process around this?

Under the PPLA, the partner of a new parent is able to take two weeks of unpaid leave when a child is born. While all partners took some leave around the birth of their child, none of them used the PPLA entitlement, with finances being the main reason – at an already financially precarious time, families couldn't afford to lose another two weeks' income. Instead, partners took a variety of paid leave: some used annual leave, some used domestic sick leave, and some received discretionary leave from their employer.

Also under the PPLA, a parent is able to transfer some of their leave entitlement over to their partner. However, no participants did this. The only male partner who undertook primary caregiving of their child in the first year was Katie's; however, this decision was mostly based on the flexible and part-time nature of his work. For all other participants, the only parent to undertake full-time caregiving was the mother.

Participants gave a few reasons why they did not choose to transfer any of their leave entitlement, or have their partner undertake full-time care. Some never really discussed the alternative:

"[I]t wasn't ever discussed, it was just, I would take the time, I would apply, because I'd be the one at home with the baby & stuff." [Angela]

"It was really just always going to be me, because, because I was only off for six months as well, and with the whole feeding and, it just wasn't going to work." (Caroline)

Others described it as a straightforward decision based on financial reasons:

“No, because we just thought, because we couldn’t afford for me to take too long, we really needed me to be stretched out as long as possible so that the kids didn’t have to go to preschool any earlier. We would have loved for him to be able to have like a month at home, that would have been incredible.” (Elizabeth)

Gemma and her partner did discuss the possibility of him taking some of the leave, but ultimately decided to prioritise breastfeeding:

“Because [partner] and I toyed with me going back to work and him staying at home for the second half, but I like to breastfeed for that first sort of nine months, so it was like, well, do I come home to breastfeed – that was the hardest thing, like, if you have to breastfeed, well, how do you do it? Like, how do you breastfeed and work? You can’t really, unless your child...you could do mixed feeding, the morning and night and then bottle – but if you get a child like this one, who refused the bottle from the get go, you don’t have a choice.” (Gemma)

1.5 How satisfied are parents with the current leave scheme, particularly the amount and length of payments?

Unsurprisingly, all participants would have liked the amount of payments and their duration to have been higher:

“I mean, it has to be at a decent standard. Just so that women actually feel like they’ve got the option, so if you want to come back to work at six months, yeah that’s great, or if you want to have done a bit more planning and saved money or whatever and stay off for the whole year, then you can.” (Angela)

The general feeling about the current amount of payments was that it was just enough to get by on, but it was still tough for young families, particularly in the period of unpaid leave:

“...more would have been nice, like, what you’re actually getting paid would have been nice, but it’s, it was enough that, you’d be broke but you could pay your bills. You know what I mean? And if that’s the way it’s got to be, then that’s the way it’s got to be.” (Elizabeth)

“If your partner’s got a good income it’s fine, but if you’re on an average \$60,000 income, and you’ve got bills...we’re really lucky that we’re renting from my parents so we have a really low rent, if we had to pay a mortgage, there is no way I could afford to come out for a coffee or, um, our groceries would be really budgeted, like, we’re quite lucky that we can have a decent amount of money for food and things like that, but things like Christmases and birthday presents and things like that, you just wouldn’t have the extra cash for them. It would be a real struggle, a real struggle.” (Gemma)

However, Isabelle and Natalie’s experiences with receiving no paid parental leave, and hence going back to work at eight weeks and five weeks respectively, indicate that the current scheme is allowing parents to stay home with their children longer:

“So the first time, I was very young, so I was 21 when I had my first child, and my partner at the time, he didn’t want me to take much time off work, we’d just bought a house, so he was very, um, forceful in me going back to work full time when my baby was about 8 weeks old.” (Isabelle)

“I think if I didn’t have, like, my sister, who brought my daughter in for feeds and stuff, you know, I wouldn’t have been able to actually sustain it, and yeah, you know, it’s just too hard. Like, it’s too hard to work full time, and actually raise your children – actually, it’s too much, you need a proper break, and you need time with your baby, like, because I felt like I was just a milking machine, when I got home, I was like, OK, I’ve got to prepare enough milk for the baby for the next day in case an emergency happens and she can’t come into work or, you know? And so I just spent most of my time either working or at home making milk for the baby.” (Natalie)

Summary: how do families use paid parental leave? What role do gender equity considerations play?

The current legislation does appear to be allowing parents to stay home with their babies longer than they would otherwise be able to. However, all families experienced a drop in income during this time, and consequently still experienced financial difficulties that shaped their decision-making.

Ultimately, how families chose to use the parental leave legislation came down to a balancing act between their finances and what was in the best interests of their children: most took the maximum amount of leave they could afford in order to give their children the most amount of time at home with them. Even those participants who talked about their own desire to go back to work framed this as still ultimately in the best interests of their family:

“...at the [daycare] centre, they’ve got people who are purely devoted to being with them, and they can run and paint and music and slam about and jump and all those kinds of things, which, I, when I was at home I couldn’t do, because there were all the other pressures of, where’s the dinner and have you cleaned and meh meh meh and that kind of thing ... and so whilst people go ‘merh’ it really worked for us, it worked for our philosophy on, you know, getting the kids, they were, like I say, easily sociable and the teachers adored them and you know, so it was all good.” (Caroline)

Katie also discussed this issue in light of the depression she had experienced as a stay-at-home parent.

No participants explicitly mentioned gender equity as being an important factor in the decision-making process around parental leave: what was best for the family as a whole took priority. Some participants – notably Caroline – discussed their desire to return to work sooner rather than later, in order to minimise the impact on their own career, which does demonstrate an element of equity-based decision-making. However, in the period of paid parental leave, there was no evidence of deliberate efforts to involve fathers in primary

caregiving in an attempt to 'spread' the impact of having children on careers. It is notable that only one partner (Katie's) undertook full-time care of their child, and that was a mainly pragmatic decision based on the flexible nature of his work.

2. How do families use the legislation to re-integrate back into the workforce?

How supportive are workplaces of pregnant employees?

Most participants reported having a positive experience in the workplace while pregnant:

"Yeah, [manager] was really good. So I've had no issues with wanting, you know, when I need to leave, needing time off for maternity appointments and all that sort of stuff, I've really had no issues whatsoever. It's been easy for me, so. They've been pretty understanding." (Gemma)

"And so, you never felt, because, we are generally a team of generally females, and so, um, it was kind of, there was never a sense of, it was more a sense of celebration of the whole fact that there was another bump." (Caroline)

Two participants did experience a more negative reaction to their pregnancies. The first was Angela, who at the time was working in a conservative and male-dominated workplace:

"I announced my pregnancy... and I distinctly remember one of the directors groaning..." [Angela]

The second was Natalie:

"I think my employers were disappointed, you know? ... I think they possibly thought that, yeah, because when I got pregnant I'd only been working for them for about six months, and I think that they thought that that was premature, to get pregnant, because, like, you can sort of time these things!

You hadn't earned it yet.

Yeah, that's right! And so I think that, yeah, I felt guilty, I felt very very guilty for getting pregnant, and ruining, you know, the cycle of work." (Natalie)

While most participants felt that they had received adequate information from their employers about their entitlements to parental leave, some did voice concerns about the complicated nature of the process:

"...I'm glad that I knew it inside out because I had to for my job, but I think if you're a staff member who doesn't have to deal with it, and, you know, you deal with it once or twice or three times, you don't deal with it all the time, and there's so many forms and there's so much to make sure you've got right and to do the right way round and it's quite scary, because it's...

Yeah, if you mess up...

If you mess up it's a lot... you know, it's your pay and it's important and, it's at a time when I think you're also thinking so much about the baby and about being pregnant and all that sort of stuff that it's, trying to juggle those two really important things is quite hard." (Elizabeth)

While Natalie had her child before the introduction of paid parental leave, she was still entitled to unpaid leave and parental tax credits. However, she felt that her employer at the time could have handled this better:

"But also I just don't think they had enough mothers, and they didn't have enough awareness about it, and even the HR processes, in my view, especially where I am now, I think that they were kind of a bit backward. And, um, yeah, they kind of just had a mentality where the work's gotta be done, the work's gotta be done, and we don't care which widget does it, so long as there's a widget there that will push the widget through." (Natalie)

2.1 Do parents keep in touch with the workplace when on leave?

Under the PPLA, employees on parental leave are not able to work; however the boundaries are somewhat blurred as to what steps they are allowed to take when it comes to keeping in touch with the business. Angela was the only participant who made an effort to stay in touch with what was going on in the business while on parental leave:

“Yeah, because, you can’t just...well, I didn’t find I could, just put a line down and say ‘right, this is my private family life, and for the next twelve months nothing else exists.’” (Angela)

However for the majority of participants, their only contact with their workplace while on parental leave was on a social basis. This was still valued, however:

“Really social, yeah, exactly, like Christmas dos we got invited and that kind of thing, just to go along, but not get connected to work, so it was, yeah. So it was pretty easy to stay in touch, keep your face in the loop, but not actually be a part of the day to day stuff, so it was quite easy actually.” (Caroline)

2.2 Would parents like to have greater contact with the workplace while on parental leave?

As discussed previously, the National Government has introduced 40 hours of ‘keeping in touch’ days effective 1st April 2016. These were not in effect at the time of interview; however under the ‘Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months’ Paid Leave and Work Contact Hours) Amendment Bill’ currently before Parliament, employees on parental leave would be able to work for up to 156 hours in the total 12 months of parental leave, and participants were asked their views on this proposed policy. The policy is envisioned as a way to help employees keep in touch with the business and maintain their skills. However, some participants were sceptical about the idea:

“I, like with all my friends and stuff that have had babies, I haven’t really heard anyone say that they, um, would want something like that, or that they feel disconnected from their work while they’re away, or... I’ve never heard anyone, usually people are just so, like you said, so wrapped up in their babies, and, like, everything that goes with it, looking after a little baby, that you just think ‘thank god I don’t have to think about work right now!’ You know? And really, going in for morning tea and a social hello and ‘here’s my baby, isn’t she lovely’, that’s probably about all you really want.” (Elizabeth)

However, others thought the idea had some value:

“I can understand that, in regards to, working in HR there’s a lot of legislation you have to keep up to date with, so...

So it moves quite fast?

So perhaps if I was working in payroll, and if I took twelve months off, and we had a new Holidays Act go through, we had, you know, um, new parental provisions go through, it would possibly be a good idea to come in and have maybe a training session around the new changes that have happened in the twelve months, that would possibly be a really good idea.” (Isabelle)

2.3 How easy do parents find it to re-integrate back into the workforce?

Most participants had a relatively smooth transition back into the workforce, with their employer ‘easing’ them back into their roles:

“...the first time back – she [manager] did like a re-induction thing, if you like, of, um, getting back in touch with the business, getting to meet people, remembering where stuff was, getting up to speed with changes, all that kind of thing, so it was really nice that it was, I didn’t, I didn’t feel like I had to hit the ground running on day one, it was like, first day back, late start morning, you know, later time to start so you could settle littlies at the daycare centre and that kind of thing, yeah, so it was really good, it was very well done.” (Caroline)

Katie had found it more difficult to re-integrate, as she had taken five years off paid work after the birth of her first child; while she had done volunteer work in this time that enabled her to maintain skills, she felt that there was a big learning curve in coming back to paid work.

Many participants mentioned the importance of coming back to work for them as individuals, which acted as a motivating factor for returning to work:

“But also I like the social aspect of work, so I was ready to go back for that. And there’s a really good group of people. So it’s quite cool to go back into a good work atmosphere again. And the morale at work’s good at the moment, I think. So yeah.” (Gemma)

“Yeah, I think I was, um... could I have done longer? Maybe, but do you know what, the thing is as well, I’m quite, I love my family, but I also value my sanity.” (Caroline)

Another aspect of returning to work was negotiating the hours to be worked. Most participants varied their work patterns to some degree after returning from parental leave – by working shorter hours, working flexible hours, or both. Generally this is to fit in with school or daycare hours, and is often a balancing act between the hours worked and the cost of daycare. Angela related the experience of a former colleague with this juggling act:

“...she managed to negotiate working just till 2.30 every day, because she had worked out that if she did work till 5, you know, full time, by the time she paid the after school fees and everything, she was going to have an extra \$6 at the end of the day ... some days she’d come in the next day and she’d go, yeah, I really should have taken the extra \$6 because the kids are just driving me nuts the rest of the afternoon. But that’s the reality, you know, that’s – there was just no point in her working full time for that six dollars, and for not having that additional time with the kids.” (Angela)

Caroline continued to work full time, albeit flexible, hours when she returned to work:

“Two reasons, I think one, I thought I was being wonderwoman, ‘I can do all of that, I can do it all because I can!’ And, but also, it was important as well I suppose from a career perspective, um, I didn’t want to um, for my role to be able to be done in anything less than a full time role, do you know what I mean? Losing your FTE, then sort of you’re only a point 8, then ‘do we need a point 8, maybe it’s only a point 6’ and then it’s, it kind of erodes away, whereas actually what we’re doing is saying that you know, it did need somebody in this role and it did need somebody to be doing it full time...” (Caroline)

Requests for alterations to working hours in order to accommodate family responsibilities are covered under the ‘Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act’ 2007, which states that employers must consider the request and have reasonable grounds for refusal. Some participants found the negotiating process reasonably straightforward, however some found it more difficult, notably Elizabeth:

“...my old manager sort of said that she was having a really hard time, because I was working in a shared services environment, so a whole lot of administrators in one room all sharing a workload, she said she was just having too much of a hard time, um, covering the working hours – she was just really...really really struggling with it. So, she kind of came back and pretty much said no, um, because of this reason, and I kind of went back and said, well, I’m really going to have to put some thought into this...”(Elizabeth)

Eventually another role in the department was found for Elizabeth that allowed her to work her requested hours:

“And I was a bit hurt at the time because I had been there for such a long time and I was a good worker and I kind of didn’t expect her to say no, because it was only a reduction of like four hours or something a week, and I really didn’t think she would not let me do that, so when she came back and said no, I was like...what?? And I thought, I kind of though, actually you can, you could make that work if you tried hard enough, you know what I mean? So I was, I was a bit

put out about that, so I was stoked when they found this other role for me.”
(Elizabeth)

Natalie’s experience prior to the PPLA and statutory flexible working arrangements provides contrast. She was less aware of what working arrangements she was entitled to, and her main priority was keeping her job, which as a shift worker and a single parent was a significant challenge:

“And so there was a lot of pressure on me, especially like, with that, sort of, midnight rotation that we had to do those three shifts, um, you know, I still honoured them, and it was really hard with a young baby, like, the first one was really hard, but what they said I could do, I guess – they’re kind of mean to you really, but I thought it was so nice of them to allow me to do this, but they actually allowed me to take my daughter in when I did the seven nights, and so we, I brought in a carry cot and just kept her there overnight. When I look back I think that that’s not the best practice in the world! But at the time I was really grateful that they had still allowed me to keep my job, and stay on with them.”
(Natalie)

2.4 How does having children change career goals? How does parental leave play into these changes?

Almost all participants said that having children had significantly changed their career goals. Generally this was framed as changing priorities – their family was now more important to them than their career:

“...after I had children, I just, it was just so unimportant. It was just so unimportant. So then I looked for work that actually fit around the children.”
(Natalie)

“...I guess the focus has gone off all the money, sort of, to, I want to be a mum and that’s my job now. So definitely career goals have changed.” (Gemma)

“...for the last 17 years it’s always been, um, I didn’t really have goals as such, because I wanted to just sit in my job, do my job, do a good job, be the best that I could be, but not bother about going any further, just bring the paycheque home,

pay for my kids' things, put food on the table, you know, all that sort of stuff, but family always comes first. I never wanted to do anything that would mean it would take more time away from my family." (Isabelle)

Several participants mentioned that they made an active choice not to seek to advance their career while their children were young, perceiving that it would require a greater investment of time and energy than they were willing to give:

"... maybe when they're both at school, um, or something I could maybe start looking at how I could better myself in my career, but to be honest, at the moment, I'm just happy that I've got a supportive workplace, I can come to work, I enjoy the work that I do and I enjoy the people that I work with, I can do my thing, go home, have my kids, you know, like... I'm not...yeah, probably that interested in worrying about what direction my career's going at the moment. I just would rather focus on my kids being little." (Elizabeth)

"I guess if I wanted to move up, it might be a completely different story in terms of hours and things like that. But I just, my focus is on my kids for the next five years, so. Once he goes to school then I'll reassess..."

Where you want to go.

Where I want to go. But I get the pay I need, I get the support I need, the hours I need, I don't see why I need a corporate car and an extra \$20,000, like, at this point." (Gemma)

Natalie also felt that having children had changed the nature of the work she was interested in:

"And so when I first had my daughter I'd actually worked in, like, most of my stuff was geared towards a marketing side of things, but then when my second daughter came along, I didn't want to do anything like that, I started working for the unions, started doing humanistic type things, got on the board of trustees, the PPTA at school, and then actually, my life actually centred around, how can I make a difference to people in society, you know, I really want to save the butterflies or whatever, you know! It just changed." (Natalie)

For Katie, while she had continued to advance her career, it was also with a family focus: having started working in a family-friendly organisation, her career goals were then focused on moving up within that organisation due to its supportiveness. Interestingly, she also partially attributed her success to the custody arrangements she shared with her ex-partner: as custody was shared 50-50, this meant she had time without her older two children that allowed her to focus on study, more so than she felt she would have been able to if she had not separated from her partner.

Angela attempted to continue to advance her career after having children, however she found it more difficult than she expected, and had to make compromises in her career to accommodate the needs of her family:

"I mean I often, I laugh because when I met my husband I was earning significantly more money than what he was, and I'm only just now getting up to kind of touching on where he is. Which just pisses me off so much. You know, the fact that I really do feel that I've had to...and I mean a lot of it could be to do with my own sanity and the way I react to things as well but... yeah, and perhaps if I wasn't in HR, if I was in a more, in a role that wasn't so, you know, go go go, negative negative negative, fix this fix this fix this, you know, then it may have been easier." (Angela)

Summary: how do families use the legislation to re-integrate back into the workforce?

The parental leave legislation, as it currently stands, does not support the process of re-integrating back into the workforce. Instead, this is largely left up to the discretion of the individual employer. Generally speaking, they are supportive of employees returning from parental leave, but there is no requirement on them to provide re-training and extra support. The proposed 'work contact hours' in the 'Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave and Work Contact Hours) Amendment Bill' might help employees to re-integrate, however the participants interviewed had mixed

feelings about such a step. The chief reservations were that they did not want to be required to come into work while still getting to grips with being a new parent. While the Bill does specify that no employee shall be required to come in for these contact hours, it is possible that employees will feel obligated to do so, or feel guilty if they refuse.

The 'Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act' 2007 plays a much greater role in this period than does the PPLA, and the participants had generally had good experiences with it. An closer examination of its functioning is outside the scope of this thesis; however the legislation clearly plays a vital role in managing the work-life balance for new parents, especially given the considerable changes in career goals that most participants experienced after having children.

It appears that more could be done to support the career aspirations of the mothers of young children, as demonstrated by Angela's difficulties; Katie's experience with sharing custody is also interesting. These experiences demonstrate the importance of having a supportive and flexible workplace for individuals who want to continue their careers after having children. Even for those individuals who were happy to take their main focus off their careers while their children were young, flexibility was still vitally important when it came to maintaining their participation in the workforce.

It is critical that women are able to maintain a connection to the formal labour market after having children if the gender pay gap is to be redressed (Callister, 2002, p. 284) and the provision of adequate parental leave plays a key role in this, by ensuring women can return to their jobs after having children. But parental leave is not the only tool – a supportive employer is also crucially important in providing the conditions that support new parents in their roles. Otherwise, parents who struggle to balance paid work and childcare may end up dropping out of the labour force completely.

3. What is the lasting impact of paid parental leave on families who have used it?

3.1 How do families manage childcare responsibilities after their return to work?

All participants used some kind of formal care for their children at some point. Isabelle and Natalie, who returned to work when their children were 8 weeks and 5 weeks old respectively, relied on family members to care for them while they were very young, but used formal care later. Katie also initially had her partner caring for their daughter full-time.

A major challenge for the parents of young children is how to manage childcare responsibilities that clash with work – the frequently cited example was an unwell child that needed to be picked up from school or from daycare at short notice. To manage this, participants either used formal leave (domestic leave or sick leave), or had access to flexible working arrangements that allowed them to either work from home or make up the time elsewhere. Those employees who had flexible working arrangements spoke of its huge benefit to them as parents:

“And then you feel guilty if you’re having to stay home because they’re sick, but then you feel guilty if you send them to preschool if they’re a little bit sick, but it’s like, well, which guilty am I supposed to feel today, and you know, who am I going to let down? It’s, so to have that weight lifted, and to have someone like [manager] say, ‘do you know what, don’t stress, it’s ok, it’s ok, you need to be a mum today, don’t worry about it,’ it’s just like ‘oh, thank god’, that is so good. So you know, having a good manager is, you know, being a young, being a mum with young kids, it’s just a world of difference.” (Elizabeth)

“...it alleviates the sense of guilt. Because what you find is that you know that they’ve trusted you, and so you’re more likely to give a little bit more, so I will sit there for an extra hour on a Sunday doing whatever it might be, or I might, I will be on the phone until 9 o’clock doing something, because, because I know that they’re giving me that flexibility, so that, you know, you kind of give a little, take a little... I think if you can afford that, it just takes the pressure off, whoever’s the

lead childcare giver, you know, it takes the pressure off, the guilt off, and then, and without that guilt you're far more effective." (Caroline)

3.2 How are childcare responsibilities divided between partners?

There was considerable variation in how those participants with partners shared childcare responsibilities, and their reasons for doing so. Angela aimed for reasonably equal sharing with her husband:

"...we do everything sort of 50-50, yeah. I mean obviously if he's got a meeting and it's his turn, he's got an important meeting I'll say, well that's fine, you know, we work it around like that, but I'm very very, well, the thing is I wouldn't marry someone who wasn't like that. So... I know people go 'oh, you're so lucky,' and I go well, not really, I made a conscious decision to choose someone like that."
(Angela)

Isabelle shared custody of her children, which impacted on her childcare arrangements:

"...two of [children] are week on, week off anyway, so the week I have them, it's all on me, the week I don't, it's all on the dad, or his partner, just whatever. So that's quite simple." (Isabelle)

Most other participants with partners, however, tended to take the majority of childcare responsibilities. There were a variety of reasons given. Some cited the nature of their partner's job that made it more difficult for them to take time off:

"...because the fact that I can work remotely, so I've actually got the facilities at home to be able to work remotely, he doesn't have that, so it makes it harder for him because he works, he has to be meeting people during the working day rather than being able to sit at night on a spreadsheet like I can do." (Caroline)

"...he's quite lucky because he's sort of his own boss, like, he can get away with leaving work for an hour if we have to be, or leaving work early, um, he doesn't

really have to answer to anyone as such. But he, obviously he has to answer to some of his clients ... but I was always the one who took time off when the kids were sick, and ... it was easier for me than him, unless something was on, that I had to go to." (Gemma)

Some also mentioned the attitudes of their partner's employer as an obstacle:

"... I couldn't just pop back and collect the kids if something happened, so I was more reliant on my husband and my mum and that. And my husband was just telling him that this was going to be happening, and he made the comment that 'oh, perhaps...' what did he say, it was words to the effect that 'oh, perhaps she needs to sort of, become more responsible with regards to mothering her children' type thing." (Angela)

"...well actually, we share it, but, well, I do more than he does, but he does do it, but the attitude from his work is so different from the attitude from my work. They say 'can't she do it?' You know, if he says 'I have to stay home because [first child]'s sick,' 'can't your wife do it?' You know? Whereas no one would ever say that to me." (Elizabeth)

"Two of my staff are actually part time and their husbands work in industries like that, and the same thing, like, they always maximise all of their sick leave or domestic sick, and you know, it's not my place to comment on their family arrangements but I do know that the reason why is because their, like, one of their husbands is a builder, he'd be laughed off the site if he said, oh, I've got to go pick up my son. 'Send the wife!'" (Natalie)

Katie was the only participant whose partner tended to take on the majority of childcare responsibilities, due to the nature of his job. Notably, he was also the only partner to be the exclusive caregiver while their child was young.

3.3 Do participants feel that paternity leave would help redress issues of gender inequity in parenting?

Most participants were in favour of some form of paternity leave, however they varied in how they would like to see it implemented. Some would have liked their partner to have more time with them immediately after their child's birth:

"I think, um, like for dads to have that, say, two months when the baby's new, to get that bonding time, you know, everything's so new and you're really getting to know your baby, for dads to be able to take that time off and not feel bad about it or financially stressed about it, or whatever, I just think that would just be amazing. You know, and for the mum, because it's hard, you know? And you know, you need support, and for you both to be there and to be bonding with your baby and working as a team and doing it together, I just think that's gotta be so much better and so much more tight-knit..." (Elizabeth)

Some wanted their partners to have exclusive care of their children while they were very young:

"...I kind of think it does need more than just those five days that my husband had because we weren't into a routine, we weren't settled, it was all new and exciting, whereas if you actually just see what it's like for that two months drudgery or whatever, yeah." (Angela)

Others thought that a more flexible approach, to suit the differing needs of families, would work better:

"...until they become big enough to start doing the rough & tumble, and that's when dad steps in. And in actual fact, that probably is a better split, you know, like maybe eighteen months down the track, that there is a parental provision for poppas to step in for a few weeks and just kind of ... I don't know." (Caroline)

There were also reservations expressed, such as how this would impact on breastfeeding. More pessimistically, it was also queried whether men would take up the leave if it looked like it might impact negatively on their own lives and careers:

“Actually just imagining men talking about it now, it would definitely be, ‘oh sweet, I’ve just got two months paid parental leave I can take, if I take it then I can go away with the boys, because that’s right when hunting starts and... ‘ They would! Honestly, you’re right, they would definitely plan it around themselves. Yeah. Not everyone, it’s definitely not all of them, so you know, I know one or – a couple of guys, through my time, that have been home with the kids, the mother’s skipped town and the guys have been home, you know, I hear stories, um, of men taking care of the babies and they change their whole life for these babies. But I think the norm is, the mother and the dad just does it when it’s convenient. Yeah.” (Isabelle)

Even if paternity leave was introduced, it was hard to say what impact it would have. Caroline discussed how she felt that being the primary caregiver for their children in their first months affected the division of care later on:

“... I’ve taken that lead role, if you like, as the primary caregiver, and I think that’s probably come about. If there had’ve been more of an option to ... to break that, um, would it have changed? I don’t know, I think it also comes down to employer, like, what flexibility, what opportunities they’ve got, but, um, yeah, we might’ve balanced things out a little more, but ...

Yeah, so if he’d had, you know, two months alone with the kids by himself, having to cope by himself, that might’ve changed things.

Potentially, maybe more around the – even the day-to-day school runs and pickups and things, maybe, I don’t know. It’s hard to know really, isn’t it.”
(Caroline)

Summary: what is the lasting impact of paid parental leave on families who have used it?

The lasting impact of paid parental leave on families, particularly in the area of gender equity, is difficult to discern. The only notable exception is that of Katie, whose partner was their daughter's exclusive caregiver for a time, and continues to play a large role in caregiving now. No other male partners took on a full-time caregiving role. It could be suggested that this pattern might be repeated elsewhere, whereby men who spend time as their children's full time caregiver continue to be more involved later in their lives.

However, Katie's partner's existing working arrangements made it easier for him to be a full-time caregiver. No participants had the experience of partners who worked in a more conventional 9-5 job becoming full-time caregivers. While money was a driving factor behind this – most male partners were on a higher income, and it therefore made economic sense for the lower-paid partner to take all the leave – it is not unlikely that a hostile workplace also played a role. Several participants' partners had experienced difficulties in taking time off work to care for their children on a day-to-day basis, largely due to gender-based assumptions about the nature of parenting, and it seems likely that they would have similar difficulties taking parental leave.

While most participants would have liked their partners to receive paid leave, many did not justify it on gender equity grounds (although some did, notably Angela). Instead, it was mostly justified on the grounds of having extra help with a new baby.

4. What impact does New Zealand's paid parental leave legislation have on gender equity?

Returning to the principles of what gender equity in the workplace actually is that were established in chapter 1, what experiences of the participants might demonstrate that paid parental leave is having an impact on gender equity?

Most relevant in this context is the ability of both men and women to balance work and family life successfully. Also important is the extent to which employers provide supportive conditions for their employees.

4.1 To what extent do participants feel they can successfully balance work and life responsibilities with their partners? What role does gender play in this?

When asked directly, most participants did not feel that parental leave had any lasting impact on gender equity:

“Um, in my experience none, it has nothing to do with gender equality, it just means you can afford to maybe have a baby, yeah ... I don’t know anyone in my circle of friends that that has impacted in a gender way. Just meant that the mum could stay home with the babies, and the dad wouldn’t be stressed out because of the mortgage having to be paid. That’s, that’s it.” (Isabelle)

Gender equity was not explicitly mentioned as being an important factor in the decision-making process around parental leave: what was best for the family as a whole took priority. However, many did discuss gender-related issues that came up in their lives as parents.

There is an element of equity-based decision-making in Angela’s case particularly, in her and her husband’s attempts to make sure that childcare was evenly balanced between them. She was also the participant that expressed the most frustration with the limitations placed on her career by attempting to balance it with a family, and generally seemed to be the most aware of gender-related issues in parenting. Caroline also talked about taking steps to ensure her career continued after returning from parental leave, in that she felt it was important to continue to work full time to demonstrate that she could do so as a mother. Several participants also talked about the importance of working outside the home to their own sense of self and mental wellbeing; however, for many a part-time role was sufficient for this purpose. Being a mother was also a vital part of their identity that needed to be balanced against careers. In that

sense, progressing their careers at an equal pace with childless or male colleagues was not a high priority for them. Particularly while their children were young, they did not want to sacrifice the overall wellbeing of their family to their career.

Several participants also discussed how gender-based ideas about parenting affected their own lives, and how they shared parenting with their partners. Some acknowledged the conflict between trying to ensure an equal partnership, versus what worked on a day-to-day basis:

“I think because our bodies are built to, you know, to have babies and feed babies, I think nature’s telling us that yeah, we are the ones that are better at, or made for, looking after the babies better, and of course the men are the, go off and you know, hunter-gather stuff, yeah, but...It is, it’s a, trying to find that balance, isn’t it, between, yeah, how much you let nature run its course in that way and how much you don’t let it go back to the fifties.” (Elizabeth)

Others talked about a difference in the way that fathers’ roles were regarded by society:

“... I think particularly with social media too, Facebook, ‘oh, my husband’s so lovely, took the kids to the park,’ well, seriously, he should anyway, why should you be posting this on Facebook? Yeah, things like that they do, definitely. It’s annoying... and then they expect the woman to be all fawny and like, ‘oh, you’re the best dad in the world!’ No, you’re just a dad, that’s what dads do.” (Isabelle)

“...my partner, his parents are quite old, and they’ve kind of got this, a much more old fashioned view of, you know, parenthood and like, they came to stay once, they’re from Australia, and I remember my partner got up and left me in bed and he got up to get the baby, and I remember his mum going ‘oh, aren’t you *wonderful*,’ and I was like *bleurk*, like *seriously* – she was just like ‘oh my goodness, you are so good to get up to the baby, oh your father would never have done that,’ I was just like, why is he good to get up to the baby, he’s the dad!” (Elizabeth)

While parents may not often consciously make decisions around parenting based on gender equity, gender-based ideas about parenting do play a significant role when it comes to balancing work and family life. One of the most frequent areas of conflict is balancing unexpected childcare responsibilities. As discussed earlier in this chapter, male partners often faced more rigid attitudes from their employers that made it difficult for them to take time off for family reasons, such as caring for sick children.

Paid parental leave in its current form appears to do little to resolve these gender-based conflicts. While many participants would have liked their partners to have been able to take parental leave, they all said the current leave scheme was too restrictive to allow them to do so: payments were not long enough to make transferring them over to partners a feasible option, there is no paid paternity leave available, and with the majority of male partners being the higher earner, there was an incentive to keep them working. There also appears to be hostility on the part of employers towards male employees taking time off for family-related reasons. The current paid parental leave scheme does not address these issues; nor does other legislation such as the 'Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act' 2007. Hence, there appear to be significant gender-based roadblocks when it comes to individuals successfully balancing work and family, which paid parental leave is not effective at resolving.

4.2 Do participants receive the support from employers that enable them to maintain their desired career trajectories?

Many suggestions for possible improvements to parental leave centred around the importance of a supportive and flexible workplace for the parents of young children who want to advance their careers:

“...flexible working has been way more important to me than having extended parental leave. Longer parental leave would have been great, but it has been flexible working conditions that have allowed me to stay in work while having children and continue to progress my career. If I had only had parental leave and

no flexible working conditions, I wouldn't have been able to stay in work with the life events that have happened (family bereavement, separations, periods of solo-parenting)." (Katie)

"It's about reducing the panic for a female going back into the workforce to think that they should be at a middle executive level, once they've finished their family, because you just can't...yeah, you just can't do it. You have to rely on, you need, you need support and help, and to do that you need an employer that will support you, trust you, and guide you." (Caroline)

Participants in the current study had generally supportive employers when it came to maintaining their desired career trajectory. Caroline had managed to advance to a managerial role due to the supportiveness of her employer. Isabelle had also benefitted from a supportive employer – while she did not want to move to a more advanced role, she was provided with training and support that enabled her to move to a different role after she expressed interest in doing so.

Angela had perhaps faced the most challenges in advancing her career after having children. Initially she decided that she no longer wanted a managerial role:

"... because I'm an introvert, when I used to go home at night, that was my down time, and now it's just not. I have no down time. And so I was just never recharging my batteries or anything, and I also found out that managing people is very stressful, and I don't actually like managing people, and then having to come home and manage a whole household, like, with my husband but, um, it was just horrific. So, I sort of made the decision that, ok, definitely for the interim I don't want to be managing people, so when I came to Company Y I went back to an advisory role, which I was much more comfortable with." (Angela)

She later moved to a more challenging role at a different company. However, she ultimately made the decision to return to her original, more supportive employers:

“But I just didn’t really feel I had the headspace or, it wasn’t best for the family and that’s why I came back to Company Y, because the days were shorter, you get the extra leave, that type of thing. There is a lot more flexibility, whereas Company Z were a bit more ... like Company X, from the point of view that...

More rigid.

Yeah, and they’re getting better, but it’s still not as free-flowing as it is here.”
(Angela)

Angela’s experience indicates that there is variation in how supportive employers are of employees attempting to balance work and family. While an employee may be able to successfully advance their career within an organisation – as Caroline did – when individuals change jobs and employers in order to maintain their career trajectories, there may be difficulties in doing so due to variations in support levels. Therefore, levels of gender equity between workplaces may also be varied.

More financial support was also mentioned, to give parents more options about when they returned to work. The relevance of payment amounts to gender equity is the way in which it constrains parents’ choices about childcare. When taking parental leave involves such financial strain, families consequently take steps to minimise it, such as having the partner on the lower income take all the leave. It may also involve one partner working longer hours to compensate for the lost earnings, something that Elizabeth experienced:

“...he’s making up for what I’m spending at home with the kids. So like, he works most Saturdays and stuff, which sucks, because it would be really nice to have the whole weekend together as a family, but really we’ve only got Sundays for that, just, because we need him to be working...” (Elizabeth)

The consequence of this is that childcare continues to be biased towards one partner, usually the female. Meanwhile, male partners are less likely to challenge the *status quo* when it come to taking time off work for childcare, and thus ensuring that gender-based ideas about childcare continue in workplaces.

Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the results of interviews with a selection of New Zealand women working in professional roles in human resources or the insurance industry about their experiences of parental leave. The women were asked to reflect on how they and their wider families have used parental leave. The questions probed them about their decision-making processes, what factors were important to them, and their experiences re-integrating into the workforce. The results suggest that there are significant conflicts and some significant gender-based roadblocks when it comes to how these women could successfully balance work and family, issues that paid parental leave itself did not appear to be resolving.

The final chapter of this thesis will now summarise these findings, and consider the implications of these for the way these women used parental leave, as well as comparing their experiences with other research on paid parental leave. I will conclude by assessing the research project as a whole for its validity and relevance, and offering suggestions for future research and policy directions.

Conclusion: Policy lessons from interviews and the future of New Zealand paid parental leave

This thesis has sought to determine the impact of the current New Zealand paid parental leave scheme on gender equity. In the previous chapter, I described and evaluated the findings from in-depth qualitative interviews with parents on the topics of paid parental leave and the demands on parents of balancing career and family. In this chapter, I summarise my findings and compare the results against other scholarly studies of paid parental leave in New Zealand. I conclude that the limited nature of current paid parental leave policy in New Zealand means that its impact on gender equity is also limited. In light of this finding, I examine the proposed changes to paid parental leave currently before Parliament to determine what impact they might have on gender equity in the workplace. I also offer suggestions for further changes to the current paid parental leave scheme that may enhance its impact on gender equity, and some areas for future research.

1. Summary of findings and comparisons against previous studies

The previous chapter outlined the results of interviews with 7 women about their experiences of paid parental leave. What is notable about the experiences they reported is that it suggests that improving their own gender equity opportunities and outcomes in paid work was *not* an explicit or immediate priority for most of these participants. When it came to making decisions about balancing work and childcare, more pressing concerns were maintaining family finances, and the wellbeing of family members. Participants did touch on gender-related issues, particularly when it came to society and employer's perceptions of the differing parenting roles of men and women, demonstrating

that gender-based ideas about parenting are still evident in New Zealand. Many of the comments of participants suggested that wider social expectations often made it difficult for parents to successfully balance work and family, and paid parental leave in its current form appears to have had little impact on these factors:

“Um, in my experience none, it has nothing to do with gender equality, it just means you can afford to maybe have a baby...” (Isabelle)

“I mean I often, I laugh because when I met my husband I was earning significantly more money than what he was, and I’m only just now getting up to kind of touching on where he is. Which just pisses me off so much.” (Angela)

“...the attitude from his work is so different from the attitude from my work. They say ‘can’t she do it?’” (Elizabeth)

From the participants’ responses it was possible to note some immediate issues about current paid parental leave policies, which may impact on how effective parental leave is in promoting gender equity in the workplace. In particular, participants all reported that the period of leave was too short to make transferring leave to partners a realistic prospect, and their partners were not allocated specific leave themselves. Further, while some employers were highly supportive of their employees with young children, this support is not universal, and individuals who shift organisations may find it difficult to maintain their desired career trajectories. Male partners in particular often experienced hostility from employers when it came to taking time off for childcare-related reasons. Against these overall observations, my discussion turns now to address some specific questions raised in this thesis.

1.1 How do families use parental leave, and how well does it advance their interests?

By far the main priority for all participants in the current study and their families was the overall wellbeing of the family. Achieving this goal in the period of

parental leave was a balancing act for this sample of women, who appeared to be juggling three main factors:

- Finances – namely, how long the family could afford to be on a reduced income;
- Child health and wellbeing – the importance of breastfeeding, bonding with a new baby, and a child being old enough to go into formal care;
- Personal wellbeing and mental health – how much a participant enjoyed being a full time parent, and how important their job and social contact outside the home was to them. The impact of a parent’s personal mental health on a child’s wellbeing was also considered; for example, some participants felt it was better for the overall wellbeing of their family if both parents were happy and fulfilled, even if this meant children were in full-time daycare.

These factors were most relevant for the women interviewed here and their families when it came to determining the length of parental leave taken; however, they were also relevant for managing the return to work, including such decisions as whether parents would work full-time or part-time.

The results reported here reflect a small group of professional women working in the insurance and human resources industries, and hence the external validity of this study is limited. However, this ‘snapshot’ can be compared against that of a wider quantitative study conducted some years ago by the New Zealand Department of Labour (2007). Participants in that study were asked to rank a variety of factors on their importance when it came to deciding when to return to work. Most highly ranked were reasons to do with child and family wellbeing – such as bonding with a new baby, establishing breastfeeding, and the availability of childcare. Financial and career-related reasons ranked less highly – though more than 50% of participants still regarded finances and maintaining their career as either important or very important (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 32). Participants in the current study, in contrast, placed less emphasis on child health and wellbeing, and more emphasis on financial reasons, than the participants in the previous Department

of Labour study. The reasons for this change in emphasis are not clear; it may be related to increased financial strain for New Zealand families across the board in the several years since the Department of Labour study (Ball & Ryan, 2013), making it tougher for families to cope on a reduced income during the period of parental leave. However, the small size of the current study, and the resulting lack of external validity of results, should be restated.

The study conducted by Schmidt (2014) on the decision-making processes of first time parents also offers valid comparisons. There are similarities with the current study with respect to how couples decided which parent would stay home in the first months of their child's life. Factors such as breastfeeding, and minimising loss of income through the partner on the higher income continuing to work, were emphasised (Schmidt, 2014, pp. 22-24). There is also concordance in decisions around the length of parental leave – there is a theme of balancing the desire to stay home as long as possible against financial necessities (Schmidt, 2014, p. 25). However, there is little mention of personal health and wellbeing in Schmidt's study – only one participant out of 11 mentioned her career as a motivating factor when determining the length of parental leave. This may be due to the nature of Schmidt's study: participants were interviewed as couples, while in the present study all participants were interviewed alone, so they may have been more frank about their own personal feelings and desires – such as not always enjoying being a full-time mother – than if their partners had been present. The one participant in Schmidt's study who did express unhappiness about being a full-time mother had already arranged with her partner that he would be the full-time carer after the period of paid parental leave; thus it was already established that she wanted to return to her career. Schmidt's study participants were also highly homogenous: all participants were white, heterosexual, in a long-term relationship and earning over \$100,000 combined. The present study had a greater diversity in ethnicities, incomes and family forms, which may explain the greater diversity of responses.

1.2 How do families use the legislation to re-integrate back into the workforce?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the PPLA itself does not prescribe re-integration into the workforce; instead, when and how this occurs is left up to the discretion of the individual employer. If non-standard working arrangements are requested – such as flexible hours or working from home – then employers will be guided by the ‘Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act’ 2007.

The Department of Labour survey found that only 7% of participants returned to work on the same hours and conditions prior to having children (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 37). Similarly, in the present study, only Natalie did not initially change her work patterns after parental leave. The Department of Labour study found that while a very small number (4%) worked longer hours, the majority of changes were around working fewer hours and/or more flexible hours (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 38). Again this finding fits well with the present study, with 6 out of 7 participants either reducing their hours, working flexible hours, or both after returning from parental leave.

The Department of Labour study also reported that 80% of participants felt that their employer had been either supportive or very supportive of them changing their work patterns (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 39). This is also reflected in the present study: while some participants, notably Elizabeth, did experience difficulties, the majority of participants had been able to change their work patterns with little difficulty, and felt supported by their employer in doing so.

1.3 What is the lasting impact of paid parental leave on families who have used it?

A ‘lasting impact’ of parental leave might take a variety of forms. For example, a ‘lasting impact’ could be a participant continuing to advance their career successfully after returning from leave, suggesting that parental leave is helping to minimise the career disruption of parents. The particular way that a family uses parental leave may also impact on long-term parenting patterns: for

example, if parental leave is shared between parents there may continue to be a greater than usual sharing between parents of childcare responsibilities. Alternatively, if an individual takes only a short period of parental leave due to a reluctance to remain out of the paid workforce for long, they may also be more likely to work longer hours, or full time, when their children are older. These factors can also be linked to one of the key indicators of gender equity in the workplace: namely, that individuals of both sexes are receiving the necessary support and conditions of work that enable them to successfully balance their work and family life.

The availability of parental leave is clearly vitally important for women being able to return to their jobs after having children. Most participants did indeed return to their previous employers after giving birth, with the exception of Elizabeth, who was made redundant while on parental leave, and Katie, who chose to leave the paid workforce for a time. However, parental leave in and of itself is not sufficient to support continuity of employment, as Angela's experience demonstrated: although she did initially return to her pre-childbirth job, the lack of flexibility and support provided by her employers meant that she moved to another job shortly afterwards.

There were no partners who shared parental leave in this study. It would be highly valuable in future research to examine cases where paid parental leave was split between male and female partners, to determine whether this increased sharing impacted on the division of childcare later on – other studies have suggested that this may well be the case (del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013; Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011). Katie's partner, the only participant's partner who acted as primary caregiver for their child, did continue to undertake a greater share of caregiving later on, and it would be valuable to explore such cases further.

There is another notable shared experience amongst participants: namely, the participants who had taken longer periods of parental leave tended to be on lower incomes at the time of interview (at least three years after having their first child), while participants who had taken relatively short periods of leave tended to be on higher incomes (see figure 5.1). These results find some support

in Crichton (2008), who notes that paid parental leave recipients are more likely to return to work, and return to work sooner, if they are on a higher income: in that survey, 83% of recipients in the highest income quartile returned to work within 12 months, while 69% of recipients in the lowest income quartile had returned to work (Crichton, 2008, p. 15). It should be noted however that this finding is one of correlation, not causation; it may be reflective of differing levels of engagement with the workforce, and different career goals, that existed prior to having children. However, this finding also brings in to question debates about the optimal length of parental leave. There is a body of research that suggests that too long a period of parental leave can lead to disengagement with the labour force, and negatively impact on future earnings (Galtry & Callister, 2005; Jaumotte, 2004; OECD, 2011; Ruhm, 1998). These findings therefore suggest that extending the length of parental leave may not be the best way to redress gender equity in the workforce.

Paid parental leave did appear to have a lasting impact on the participants in this study insofar as it supported continuity in their careers, and potentially the length of parental leave taken impacted on later career goals (although the reverse – that career goals impact on the length of parental leave taken – is also a possible scenario). However, most participants emphasised that having access to flexible working conditions and a supportive employer had a far greater impact on their lives and careers than did paid parental leave. The direct impact of parental leave stops when an employee returns to work, but the impact of their parental status on their careers does not. In order to successfully balance paid work and family, a supportive employer is needed. To reiterate Caroline's statement on this topic:

"It's about reducing the panic for a female going back into the workforce to think that they should be at a middle executive level, once they've finished their family, because you just can't...yeah, you just can't do it. You have to rely on, you need, you need support and help, and to do that you need an employer that will support you, trust you, and guide you." (Caroline)

1.4 Has paid parental leave helped to achieve greater gender equity in the workplace for women in New Zealand?

As established in chapter 3, the predominant approach to parental leave in New Zealand has been a balancing act between the importance placed on child welfare, the interests of business, and political commitment to a minimal welfare state. Baird suggests that the impact of a parental leave scheme on gender equity will be limited and uneven if a scheme is oriented towards such interests (Baird, 2004, p. 270). While the existence of parental leave undoubtedly has a positive effect on gender equity – as compared to having no parental leave available at all – Baird's thesis is that in order for women to achieve true equity in the workplace, an extensive and generous paid parental leave scheme, oriented specifically towards redressing gender inequities in the labour market, is required. While leave schemes that are oriented elsewhere may still have a positive impact on gender equity, it will not be as extensive. Has this in fact been the case in New Zealand? Specifically, given that New Zealand's paid parental leave legislation has traditionally focused on the interests of child welfare and on business, are women still facing notable challenges in maintaining their desired career trajectories that men do not, and is there evidence that women and men face different challenges when it comes to balancing work and family?

The experiences of the participants in this study suggest that New Zealand's current paid parental leave policy indeed has a limited impact on gender equity in the workplace. Firstly, participants do not perceive parental leave as having a direct impact on gender-related issues in their own lives. The limited nature of New Zealand paid parental leave contributes to this lack of impact: the limited period of payments, and their low amount, means that families are constrained in their choices when it comes to deciding which parent will undertake primary caregiving of infants. It is generally financially feasible for only one parent to take leave, and families have an incentive to minimise the loss in the family income as much as possible, meaning that fathers are much less likely to take breaks from their careers to care for children, while women (whose average salaries are below that of men in New Zealand) are more likely to take extended breaks. This then acts to reinforce gender-based patterns of childcare, which

results in men and women being unevenly impacted by their parental status in the workplace.

But are finances the whole story, or are underlying beliefs about gender roles in society, and which parent is 'best suited' to care for children, also playing a role in caregiving decisions? There was indeed strong evidence from participants' experiences that perceptions of gender-based parenting roles persisted in New Zealand society and workplaces, and these ideas impact on how childcare responsibilities are shared. Specifically, almost all male partners had less flexibility than the participants to balance childcare needs and work, which resulted in mothers taking on the majority of childcare responsibilities that interfered with the standard working day. Many participants mentioned 'just assuming' that they, as the mother, would take the entirety of parental leave, so these underlying ideas about gendered parenting roles do appear to have a significant impact on how effective paid parental leave is able to be on resolving issues of gender equity. Finances, while undoubtedly a significant factor in parental leave decisions, may not be persuasive enough to reverse traditional gender-based ideas about childcare: indeed, while two of the participants did earn a higher income than their partners, they still took the entirety of parental leave and did not give serious thought to the alternative. Given these factors, an increase in parental leave payments may have little impact on gender-based patterns of parental leave taking.

There is also the issue of the eligibility requirements for paid parental leave in New Zealand, and their inequitable outcome. The workplace participation requirements are biased towards women of higher incomes and greater job security, meaning that women with a less formal connection to the labour market miss out on paid parental leave, despite often being the most in need of the extra financial assistance (St John, 2014). This was an issue not fully captured by the participants in this study, as all worked in professional occupations and did not have work patterns that might disqualify them from paid parental leave. Callister & Galtry suggest that such participation requirements no longer make much sense in New Zealand's increasingly flexible labour market, and most women return to paid work after having children

regardless of whether they received paid parental leave or not – therefore, there is little need to create an incentive to maintain an attachment to the labour market (Callister & Galtry, 2009, p. 6).

Other, more quantitative, data are ambivalent when it comes to determining what impact, if any, paid parental leave has had on gender equity in New Zealand, and specifically whether the gender pay gap has reduced as a result. Since 1998, while the gender pay gap has decreased overall (from 16.3% in 1998 to 11.8% in 2015) it has fluctuated somewhat in that time period, and there does not appear to be a significant drop after 2002, when paid parental leave was introduced (Statistics New Zealand, 2014a). A closer examination of the impact of paid parental leave on the gender pay gap, and on the earning patterns of women in general, would require a far more wide-reaching survey than the current project.

Overall, however, it seems that the limited nature of the current New Zealand paid parental leave scheme is having a correspondingly limited impact on gender equity.

2. Implications for future policy directions

2.1 Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Six Months' Paid Leave and Work Contact Hours) Amendment Bill

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, while paid parental leave is currently a prominent issue on the New Zealand political agenda, justifications for extending paid leave are almost exclusively framed in terms of child wellbeing. What, then, might be the implications of the current suggested policy on gender equity, in light of the results produced by this thesis?

The proposal currently before Parliament would extend paid leave out to 26 weeks. All participants interviewed were, unsurprisingly, in favour of such a move – it would help to ease the financial strain on families, and give parents

more choice about when to return to work after having children. However, it would likely not have much impact on gender equity as compared to the current scheme of 18 weeks' paid leave. As discussed above, the existence of gender-based ideas around parenting means that an increase in the duration and level of payments may not have an impact on patterns of leave-taking. The only possible change might be that the longer period of leave might make it more feasible to transfer leave over to partners, something that rarely occurs at present. But the dominance of child health and welfare themes in the debate over this Bill, as previously discussed, means that its impact on gender equity will again likely be limited.

The other notable aspect of the current proposal is the 'keeping in touch' days, which have since been implemented in a more limited form by the National government. Elizabeth in particular was hesitant about this, while some other participants were cautiously in favour. In theory they could work well to support parents' re-integration back into the workforce, and could also help with the sense of social isolation that many new parents feel (Schmidt, 2014, pp. 26-27), perhaps enabling them to stay at home for longer overall. However, the implementation of such a policy needs to be mindful that parents are not being pressured to come in for these days.

The likelihood of other changes to paid parental leave in the future is uncertain. Returning to McAdam et al's (1996) social movement theory, there appears to be little political opportunity for a generous extension to parental leave at present. The National government has not extended the welfare state, and instead has emphasised flexibility in the workplace. It has been hostile to any extension to paid parental leave that would involve greater cost if there is not a clear 'need' (for example, the extension of leave for parents of premature babies was in response to these parents' clear need for additional time off work), although it has shown itself to be receptive to gradual and incremental extensions to leave. There are mobilising groups that back extensions on the grounds of infant health – several groups have got behind Labour's Bill, such as 26 for Babies and La Leche League. The framing processes used by these groups have centred around emphasising child welfare. But in this current climate, it

does not appear likely that anything other than further incremental changes to the length, amount and/or eligibility for payments would occur. Gender equity is simply absent from the framing of the debate. The fragmentation of the New Zealand women's movement has contributed to this silence. Consequently, it appears that Baird's declaration that paid parental leave schemes developed without specific gender equity considerations will have "limited, uneven and insecure outcomes" (Baird, 2004, p. 270) for women will continue to hold true in New Zealand, especially considering the continued dominance of the welfare orientation and/or the business orientation in the political debate.

2.2 Other suggestions

Callister & Galtry suggest that the key question over future policy changes for paid parental leave is whether to continue on the current path of incremental changes, or whether a radical new policy direction is required (Callister & Galtry, 2011, p. 69); additionally, Baird states that "if women's multiple roles and economic interests are to be properly recognised, policy grounded in a different orientation is required" (Baird, 2004, p. 270). This thesis suggests that incremental changes to paid parental leave in New Zealand – such as further extensions to the period of paid leave, increases in payments, or changes to eligibility requirements – will likely have a limited impact on gender equity. So what might a 'radical new policy direction' consist of – one that departs from New Zealand's traditional business and/or welfare alignment with regards to parental leave, and instead aligns itself more closely with Baird's equity orientation?

Paid parental leave plays an important role in gender equity in that it ensures that women are able to return to their jobs post-childbirth. But equally important is a supportive and flexible working environment, if working parents are to continue to advance their careers. Most participants in this study worked in a supportive environment, and said how lucky they felt to do so: they aligned their careers in order to stay within the organisation, and valued the trust that their employers placed in them. Therefore, creating flexible and supportive working environments ought to be a key part of efforts to reduce the

‘motherhood penalty’. It is also important to ensure that both women and men have flexible and supportive employers, to reduce the burden that is currently disproportionately on women to manage conflicting childcare and work responsibilities.

Another part of the solution is education. While awareness of parental leave provisions was good amongst the participants in this study, because many participants worked in the human resources field, it is probably not an accurate representation of awareness about parental leave in the general population. Two participants, who did not deal directly with parental leave as part of their jobs, were unaware of the amount of payments before falling pregnant. This suggests that greater education in the workplace, both about parental leave and about how to balance careers and families more generally, might be advantageous.

A further option is removing the workplace participation requirements from paid parental leave. Currently this biases the legislation towards women of higher incomes, while women with less formal connection to the labour market miss out. A universal payment for new parents has been suggested to change this element of ‘middle class capture’, as well as helping to alleviate child poverty (Callister & Galtry, 2009; St John, 2014) creating a more equitable outcome for women.

The other major potential policy direction is enabling more partners to take parental leave. Additional provision for partners to take parental leave is almost entirely absent from the current policy debates, and the current legislation is not framed in a way that encourages them to do so – consequently, very few do. There is mixed evidence as to whether an increase in partners and fathers taking parental leave has a long-term effect on gender equity (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014; del Carmen Huerta et al., 2013; Ekberg et al., 2013; Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011). However, the current patterns of parental leave-taking in New Zealand are highly gendered, and it is possible that this leads to an entrenchment of gender roles in parenting as children grow older.

Currently partners are entitled to two weeks’ unpaid leave under the PPLA, however this is rarely used; none of the participants’ partners in the current

study used it, preferring instead to use various forms of paid leave in the weeks after their child's birth, and in the Department of Labour study, only 4% of partners used the unpaid leave (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007, p. 41). The most commonly cited reason for this lack of uptake was that families could not afford the unpaid leave. Thus, making the leave paid would be a first step towards encouraging partners and fathers to take more leave when their children are young.

There was considerable variation amongst participants as to what other kinds of leave they would have liked to have available to their partners. Some wanted the leave focused on the post-birth period, while others wanted it available over a longer period of time – for example, so fathers could take time out from paid work a year or so after the child's birth. This suggests that any form of paternity leave should be flexible, to enable families to arrange it to best suit their own circumstances. A leave scheme such as the United Kingdom's, where partners are able to share 39 weeks of paid leave between them as they see fit (Sinclair, 2015) might work well in this instance.

However, as previously discussed, several participants in this study mentioned the gendered nature of New Zealand parenting. Almost all had examples from their own lives where it was either assumed that, as mothers, they should be the ones to undertake primary care of children, or had experienced fathers who did undertake childcare being excessively praised for doing so, with the implication that it was something exceptional and out of the ordinary: "While women become mothers, men still in many cases choose how to practice their fatherhood." (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014, p. 20) The implication is that awarding families generous and fully transferrable paid parental leave – while it would undoubtedly support families in this financially precarious time – may have little impact on the gendered patterns of parenting that can affect women's participation in the paid workforce. It may take a more interventionist approach to alter these attitudes. The United Kingdom's experience backs this up – a year after the introduction of extended shared leave in the United Kingdom, few fathers appear to be taking up the leave (Osborne, 2016). There is additional evidence that in most countries where leave is allocated on a family

basis – i.e. its use is not limited to one parent but can be freely transferred between them – fathers' uptake of leave is low (Moss, 2015, p. 42). With regards to the non-use of the two weeks of unpaid leave in the PPLA, while the financial strain on young families should not be underestimated, it also raises the question of why families find it so hard to justify partners taking two weeks of unpaid leave, while mothers frequently take far more than this. Even accounting for income discrepancies between partners, it suggests gender-based ideas of parenting may be playing a role in this decision.

So what policy changes might help to alter these gender-based attitudes? It appears that something targeted specifically at fathers would be needed. This could take the form of targeted paternity leave, such as the Swedish 'daddy months'. Where such a policy is introduced, a significant rise in uptake of parental leave by fathers has been observed in a number of countries (Moss, 2015, pp. 43-45). However, childcare responsibilities do not end after parental leave; there needs to be greater flexibility provided for men in the workplace as well as women, to ensure that the demands of balancing work and childcare do not fall unduly on women. A few participants mentioned the difficulty in partners in traditionally male-dominated industries, such as construction, taking time off for family responsibilities, and a change in attitudes in these fields is needed. In countries where data is available on parental leave take-up levels between genders, fathers are more likely to take leave if they and their partners are higher educated, and they work in a female-dominated field or in the public sector (Moss, 2015, p. 45).

Targeted paternity leave should not be seen as a magic bullet for the 'motherhood penalty' in the New Zealand workforce. Even in family-friendly Sweden, where targeted leave has been in place since 1995, there is still a gender pay gap (OECD, 2012, p. 150), and mothers still take more leave than fathers (Moss, 2015, p. 43). However, if a radical new policy direction is sought, targeted paternity leave appears to hold the most potential, and would likely significantly enhance paid parental leave policies in New Zealand.

However, the likelihood of such a change occurring is uncertain. As discussed previously, paternity leave is a topic that is simply absent from the New Zealand

debate, and gender equity is not a prominent 'problem'. This absence is likely due to the low political profile of the New Zealand women's movement, and the movement's consequent lack of engagement with political institutions. But why the movement has such a low profile in New Zealand is another question entirely.

3. Research evaluation

The aim of this thesis was to explore the purpose and impact of PPL. Because participants were not randomly sampled, the chief limitation was the limited number and scope of participants – only seven participants were used, all drawn from professional fields of work. While inevitable due to the relatively small scope of a master's thesis, a greater number of participants would have produced a greater range of responses and experiences, which would add depth and richness to the data. For example, it would have been valuable to consider the experiences of women from a wider range of workplaces, or a parent who chose not to return to the paid workforce after having children; it would also have been useful to consider the experiences of fathers, particularly those who had been primary caregivers of their children. Furthermore, the small number of my participants means that, while I have taken steps to ensure the validity of my findings, they cannot be extrapolated to the New Zealand population at large.

The professional nature of my participants, and that all were engaged in permanent employment, should also be noted. The impact that paid parental leave has on the lives of families with two parents in stable employment will be very different to the impact it has on families in more precarious employment situations, or the impact that ineligibility for paid parental leave can have. Hence, my thesis did not fully address these issues of 'middle class capture', and the extent to which paid parental leave, or lack thereof, can impact on child poverty in New Zealand.

However, despite these inevitable limitations, qualitative research was particularly valuable in this context, as I was seeking to understand the individual experiences and motivations of parents who have taken parental leave. Using a semi-structured interview format, and generally keeping my approach quite casual and conversational, worked well in this context: it enabled me to develop a rapport with the participants that meant they felt comfortable talking about subjects such as difficulties they'd had with their employer or struggles with being a full-time parent. It also allowed me the flexibility to tailor my questions further during the course of interviews: for example, if an issue that I had not previously considered was mentioned by one participant as being very important to them, I would ask future participants about that issue as well.

This research is unique in the New Zealand context as a qualitative study on the impact of paid parental leave on gender equity in the workplace has not previously been done (previous studies have touched on the issue (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2007; Schmidt, 2014) but have not focused on it). Coming at a time when paid parental leave is subject to much political debate has made it a timely and highly relevant piece of research.

4. Areas for future research

The importance of a flexible and supportive workplace when it comes to helping women continue their careers after having children was a recurrent theme in my interviews. There is already considerable research being done in this area in New Zealand, particularly with respect to the 'Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act' 2007 (Donnelly et al., 2012; Masselot, 2011; New Zealand Department of Labour, 2011) and it may be the most fruitful area for further research when it comes to determining how the 'motherhood penalty' might be reduced in the New Zealand context. Another area for further research could be looking at fatherhood in the New Zealand context: several participants touched on how they felt father's roles were perceived, both in the

workplace and in society at large, and a more detailed examination of this issue might shed light on how best to encourage men to take more parental leave, if that is the goal. Another valuable approach would have been to examine a selection of workplaces in depth, in order to determine whether a workplace's approach to paid parental leave has long-term consequences for the gender equity within the organisation.

Conclusion

The existence of parental leave is crucial to promoting gender equity in the workforce. It enables women to take time out from work to care for young infants, while protecting their jobs. If leave is paid it also helps to prevent parents being forced to return to work earlier than they would wish in order to support their families. However, what is less clear is the extent to which paid parental leave acts to support gender equity in the New Zealand context: is the current, relatively limited, legislation having an impact, or could more be done to attempt to reduce the 'motherhood penalty' in the workplace? Do parents feel it has supported them to make the parenting choices that are best for their family, and how has it worked to enable them to continue their careers?

My research found that the participants interviewed felt that paid parental leave, in and of itself, had a mixed impact on their lives. All valued the weeks of payments that were available, helping to ease the financial strain on young families, and the employment security that parental leave offers. However, the limited amount and duration of payments meant that many participants returned to work earlier than they would have liked due to financial constraints. After returning to work, having a flexible and supportive employer was vitally important for participants when it came to continuing careers. Ultimately, it was their continuing parenting responsibilities and the challenge of combining them with paid work that participants felt had the greatest impact on their own quality of life. Furthermore, despite attempts to make the New Zealand paid

parental leave legislation more gender neutral, the interviews with these women suggests there was still a clear division of leave-taking along gender lines amongst all respondents, a pattern that was reported to continue in parenting as children grew older and participants returned to work.

Overall, while the existence of paid parental leave in New Zealand is undoubtedly valuable when it comes to easing the financial strain on young families, and allowing parents to bond with their infants and establish breastfeeding, the women interviewed in this study were less confident about the impact of the policy on wider aspects of gender equity in the workplace, chiefly due to the limited nature of the scheme itself. These experiences support my wider findings from a review of the literature, that increasing the payments, their duration and widening the eligibility requirements would be a first step towards having a more significant impact on gender equity. Furthermore, encouraging more flexible working patterns would also significantly help to support parents' career trajectories. However, the persistence of gender-based norms and expectations around the division of unpaid parenting work in New Zealand may mean that the impact of paid parental leave on resolving wider gender equity problems is limited. The experiences reported by the participants suggest that gender-based patterns of leave-taking are likely to remain unchanged by gradual extensions to paid leave provision alone. Workplace support which is flexible and available for both parents, together with reform to the paid parental leave legislation so as to support more males taking parental leave – perhaps in the form of exclusive partner's leave – may help, however. This study suggests that paid parental leave was important for these women, but more needs to be done to create a more equitable division of childcare responsibilities throughout New Zealand children's lives.

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet

Department of Political Science and International Relations

Email: mandy.stratford@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

[Date]

Paid Parental Leave and Gender Equity in New Zealand Information Sheet for research participants

My name is Mandy Stratford and I am currently enrolled in a Master of Arts at the University of Canterbury. My research involves looking at New Zealand's paid parental leave system and how well it's working. I am particularly interested in how it affects gender equity: for example, how well paid parental leave works to support women to continue their careers after having a child, and what effect it has on how parents balance work and childcare responsibilities. As part of this I plan to interview parents who have received parental leave about their experiences.

Your involvement in this project will be undertaking an interview with me of approximately 1 hour duration. It will cover topics such as how you manage childcare responsibilities, your experiences returning to work after receiving parental leave, and how you feel parental leave has, or has not, supported you to make the best choices for you and your family. I will record our interview to ensure that your responses are accurately captured. I will also ask you to fill out a confidential questionnaire containing some personal details, including age, employment history and income. Ideally the interview will take place in a public place, such as a café; however if this will be difficult for you, I am happy to work with you to find an alternative venue.

Due to the emotionally involved nature of parenting, there is a chance you may find some of the questions stressful or emotional. I will do my best to remain sensitive to your feelings throughout the interview, and at any time you can ask for the interview, including the recording, to be stopped and your responses withdrawn.

As a follow-up to this investigation, I will send you a copy of your interview transcript to ensure that you are happy that it accurately captures your responses and you are comfortable with it being used as part of my research.

You may receive a copy of the project results by contacting the researcher at the conclusion of the project.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage prior to publication of the project without penalty. If you withdraw, I will remove all information relating to you from the project. I anticipate the deadline for withdrawal from the project being 1 March.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, only myself and my academic supervisors will have access to the data, which will be securely stored in password-protected files. No real names, places of work, or any other identifying information will be used in any report of my research findings without your prior consent. The data, including your interview transcript and personal questionnaire, will be securely stored for five years, after which it will be destroyed. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master of Arts in Political Science by Mandy Stratford, under the supervision of Bronwyn Hayward, who can be contacted at bronwyn.hayward@canterbury.ac.nz. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return it to me via my email: mandy.stratford@pg.canterbury.ac.nz. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at all prior to completing the form.

Kind regards
Mandy Stratford

Appendix 2: Participant consent form

Department of Political Science and International Relations
Email: mandy.stratford@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Paid Parental Leave and Gender Equity in New Zealand Consent Form for research participants

Please read through carefully and check off each point to confirm you have read and understood it.

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that the research may involve questions that I find emotionally stressful, due to the nature of the topic. I have the right to request the interview be paused or stopped completely at any time if I am uncomfortable.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher, Mandy Stratford, and her academic supervisor Bronwyn Hayward, and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or their places of work.
- ☐ I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I am able to receive a report on the findings of the study by contacting the researcher at the conclusion of the project.

☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Mandy Stratford mandy.stratford@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or her supervisor Bronwyn Hayward bronwyn.hayward@canterbury.ac.nz ph. +64 21 2727069 for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

☐ (Optional) I would like to receive a copy of the final research project.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Signature:

Name:

Date:

Please return this consent form to me prior to your interview, either by scanning and emailing it to me or by giving it to me when we meet for your interview.

Please email me if you have any questions at all relating to the research.

Kind regards

Mandy Stratford

Appendix 3: Participant Questionnaire

Please leave blank any questions you do not wish to answer. This questionnaire is entirely confidential and will be stored securely. No identifying information will be used in the final report of results.

Personal info

Name: _____

Date of birth: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Employment information

1. Current employment status (circle one):

Working full time//working part time//on parental leave

2. How long have you been with your current employer?

3. Have you changed employers since having your first child?

4. How many parental leave periods have you taken (i.e. how many children have you had)? _____

5. What was your approximate annual income BEFORE taking your first period of parental leave? (circle one)

\$0-\$20,000//\$20,000-\$40,000//\$40,000-\$60,000//\$60,000-\$80,000 // \$80,000+

6. What is your CURRENT approximate annual income? (circle one)

\$0-\$20,000//\$20,000-\$40,000//\$40,000-\$60,000//\$60,000-\$80,000 // \$80,000+

7. Are you employed via a: (circle one)

Permanent full time contract//permanent part time contract//casual contract

8. Do you have any flexible working arrangements with your employer (e.g. variable start or finish times, working from home) – please list. _____

Appendix 4: Interview questions and talking points

- 1. Tell me about your experiences in the first few months of your child's life.**
 - Can you briefly tell me about the first year or so of your child's life – things like when you left work, when you returned to work, how you and your partner managed

- 2. What drove your decisions about childcare in the first few months of your child's life? E.g. was it based on financial factors, availability of leave from employers, ability of family/partners to help with childcare etc.**
 - Before getting pregnant, what were your plans around managing having children and working? Had you thought about it at all? Was it something you only seriously considered when you were pregnant?
 - What kinds of discussions did you and your partner have around childcare and taking time off work prior to having children? Did you make conscious decisions or were there assumptions?
 - How aware were you of the paid parental leave provisions? Did your employer provide you with sufficient information or did you have to hunt it out yourself?

- What kinds of experiences did you have in the workplace once you announced you were pregnant? How supportive were colleagues/your employer? Do you feel you were treated any differently?
- Did you discuss at all the possibility of your partner being the primary caregiver for some/all of this time? Why/why not?
- What would you say was the main factor behind you/your partner's decision to take the majority of the leave?

3. What were your experiences in the workplace when you returned from parental leave? How do you feel your parental status affects your work performance and opportunities?

- What were the main reasons behind your decision to return to work when you did?
- How did you feel about returning to work when you did? Do you feel you had enough time off?
- Did you keep in touch with work at all while you were gone? Did your employer encourage this?
- If you altered your work patterns, how was this decided on? Describe the negotiation process. How supportive was your employer?
- Have your career goals changed since having a child? Why/why not?
- What would you say was the biggest challenge about returning to work?

4. What drives your choices about how to manage childcare responsibilities that affect your work (e.g. what happens when your child is sick, or needs to be picked up early)?

- If you work part time/flexible hours, what were the reasons for this?
- Does your partner have a similar arrangement? Why/why not?
- Who is more likely to take time off work to care for children – because they're sick, during school holidays, other unexpected events? Why do you think this is? Is it because one partner's employer is more accommodating, or because one partner is 'better' at looking after them?
- How happy are you with these arrangements? Do you feel you had freedom of choice, or were you forced into it by factors beyond your control? (e.g. partner has an inflexible employer, or significantly higher income)

5. If paid paternal leave was introduced, how likely do you think it is that fathers/partners would take it up – both in your own personal situation and more generally? Why?

- The Swedish model: they have 390 days of leave in total, 60 days reserved for each parent and the rest can be shared – how well do you think something like that would work in New Zealand?
- Would you/your partner take it up if it was available? Why/why not?
- What do you think about the perception of fathers' roles in New Zealand?

6. To what extent do you feel you have been able to make the childcare and employment choices that best suit your family? What policy-related changes would you like to see to help you?

- Would you & your partner have preferred that they be the one to be the primary caregiver in the early months of your child's life, but you weren't able to make this work for your family?
- Would you like to have had:
 - longer paid leave
 - higher payments
 - more unpaid leave
 - more contact with work while you were on leave – e.g. 'keeping in touch' days
- How far do you think paid parental leave goes to help fix the gender inequality that can result from having children? What would have helped for you?

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